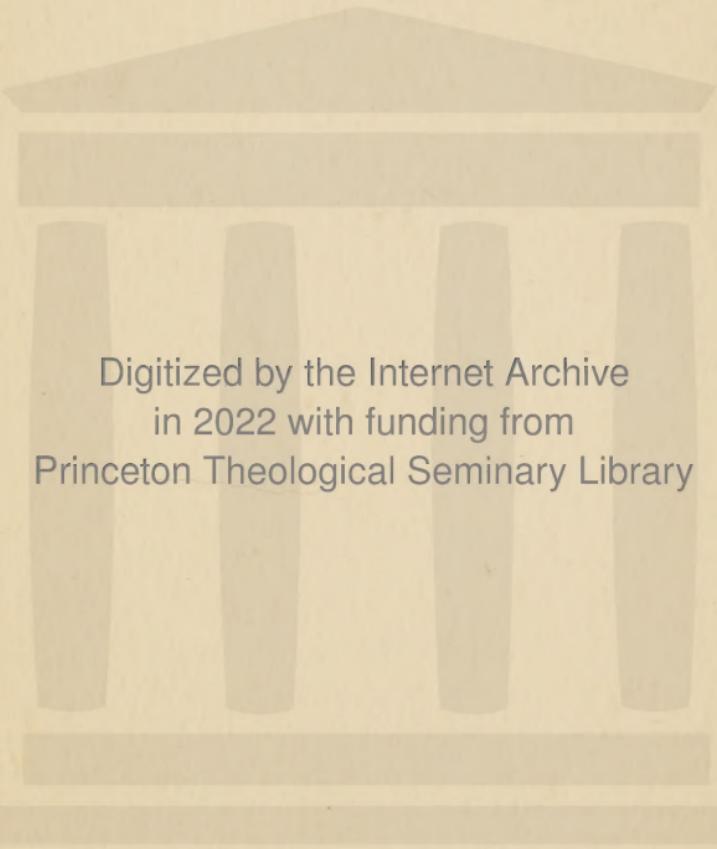


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HOW TO TEACH THE
OLD TESTAMENT

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HOW TO TEACH THE OLD TESTAMENT

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HOW TO TEACH THE
OLD TESTAMENT
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To
MY WIFE

Preface

RELIGIOUS education, both in day school and Sunday school, is at present handicapped by two obstacles, altogether apart from the inadequate training which teachers receive for this particular task. One of these is the vague feeling of uneasiness about the Bible which is widespread. People who may not know the exact conclusions of criticism have yet an impression that it has undermined the authority of the Bible as the Word of God, and this has deprived them of confidence in it as an instrument of religious education. On the other hand, those who accept the critical standpoint and its results ask themselves, "If these stories in the Old Testament are, many of them, not in the fullest sense historical, or if they exhibit an imperfect idea of God and of character, what is the good of them ? Why go on using them ?"

A brief answer to such questions may be given here. The Bible is the Word of God in the sense that it is the instrument through which God has conveyed to us the knowledge of His nature and His will for our salvation. This was done gradually. Just as a child is educated according to its growing capacity, so Israel was taught about God and duty by slow degrees. But if that is the purpose of the Bible we ought to seek in it only what it was designed to give, a knowledge of God. I might as

wisely seek the day of the week by looking at my watch as look for modern science in a book which was made for a totally different purpose. My watch was made to tell the time, and for no other end ; and the Bible was made to tell us about God, and for no other end.

The fact that the Bible shows a steady progress in this knowledge explains why the earlier stages were imperfect. And if it be asked why we teach these earlier passages, the answer is that there is truth in them for us. The truth may be imperfect, but it is of real worth, and it comes to us in actual concrete instances. I trust that the lessons that follow will amply demonstrate this. And in regard to these imperfections, if we believe that the Bible is the Word of God, containing a revelation such as we can find in no other literature, we shall not be surprised that the record is not without error, that it leaves imperfections behind as the revelation grows clearer and fuller, and that it does not contain that scientific knowledge which God designed men to find out by research.

The plan of this book is as follows. In the first part of each section facts are stated which the teacher ought to possess as a background to his teaching, whether he uses them or not. Then follow notes which explain doubtful or unfamiliar words and allusions. And finally a sketch is given of the way in which the lesson may be taught. Only a general outline is furnished which the teacher can fill out for himself.

I am greatly indebted to Miss Lucy Brown-Douglas, who generously typed the whole of my manuscript and enriched it with contributions from her wide knowledge of Scripture. Professor J. E. McFadyen, of

Glasgow, and my chief, Dr. Edward, Director of Studies in the Aberdeen Training Centre for Students, both read the manuscript, and I owe to their scholarship and experience many suggestions and criticisms which have greatly improved the lessons. Apart from the kindness of these friends I have drawn extensively upon some books which I wish to mention gratefully. Canon Glazebrook's *Lessons from the Old Testament* (Rivingtons, 3 vols.) is a work of extraordinary learning and illumination. It has always been at my hand. Professor J. E. McFadyen's *The Use of the Old Testament* (James Clarke & Co.) is so good in its general treatment that it should be in every teacher's possession. The first volume (the only one published at present) of the Rev. Basil Redlich's *Old Testament Stories and How to Teach them* (Macmillan) has also been helpful. I have also consulted Peake's *Commentary on the Bible* and *The Bible for Youth* (both published by T. C. & E. C. Jack). Professor A. R. Gordon's delightful books *Bible Stories Re-told for the Young* (Hodder & Stoughton, 4 vols.) have given me some good illustrations. And, finally, the teacher should possess, if he can, a general account of the history such as Dr. Foakes-Jackson's *Biblical History of the Hebrews* (Heffer). I have tried, however, to give the teacher all the material he needs for the teaching of the lesson.

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I. THE CREATION
GOD THE AUTHOR OF ALL GOOD
GENESIS 1¹–2³

A. For the Teacher

1. The narratives in Genesis 1–11 deal with events that are prehistoric. They are of the nature of legends. These legends often contain a kernel of historic fact, as e.g. the story of the Deluge does. In this respect they differ from myths which are creations of the imagination, without any basis of fact. But they also contain much that is traditional. It must not be imagined, however, that a legend is out of place in the record of Revelation. The Spirit of God used all kinds of literary forms in revealing truth, e.g. poetry, myth, letters, drama. The only vehicle available in early time was legend, and this story is not any the less part of the Word of God because it is the legend current in the Hebrew nation. It is a great poem of Creation, and the Divine thing in it is the revelation of God as the Source of life and order in the universe.

2. Where did it come from? Scholars are generally agreed that it is the lineal descendant of the Babylonian Creation story which we possess (see Driver's *Commentary on Genesis*). We can understand that the Hebrews brought this as well as other traditions with them

when they left Chaldea. But, frankly, one is far more impressed with the utter unlikeness of the two stories than with any likeness. The chief differences are these. The Babylonian story is grossly polytheistic, in Genesis there is a splendid monotheism. In the former the gods are born out of the Abyss, in the latter God is before all things. In the former creation is a result of fierce battles between Marduk and Tiamat (the personification of chaos). The firmament is made out of half the body of Tiamat which Marduk had cleft in two. The calm majesty of the divine fiat in Genesis is in striking contrast. If the Genesis legend has been evolved from the other it is certainly a great testimony to the power of the Divine Spirit and the presence in the story of a real revelation of God. In any case it has long left any taint of a heathen ancestry behind it.

3. Apart from the difficulty raised for some minds by the presence of legends in Scripture, there is a special difficulty in connection with the present passage. Can it be reconciled with science? And if not, can we regard it as in any sense part of the record of revelation? The answer to the first question is in the negative. Science tells us that the universe has been the result of a long evolution. Genesis says it was created in six days. It is a nice subterfuge to give any other interpretation to the word "day." The recurring formula "and evening and morning came, one day" is sufficient answer. Then, again, Geology gives a different account of the order of created things. And finally, the account which science gives of the original conditions and the gradual making of the world itself is totally different from the naive picture of a world enclosed in primeval waters and emerging from them. As to the second

question, the answer is as decidedly in the affirmative. There is no need to reconcile Genesis and Science. They are two accounts of one fact. One is a scientific account, the other a religious account. They do not conflict in the least. Scripture was never meant to teach science. The scientific knowledge of a primitive time was all that could be expected at the time ; and God used that in order to teach the supreme truth of His sovereign, creative Power.

4. In teaching Genesis 1 to very young children the facts should be given very simply as they are in the narrative. To classes over 11 or 12 years there can be no hesitation in imparting the facts as they have been given above.

B. Notes

Verse 2. *without form*: R.V. "waste," i.e. chaos.

deep: not the sea, but the primeval waters containing the earth within them.

Spirit of God: not a Person. In the O.T. the Spirit of God is God in His energy. The Trinity is a revelation of N.T. times.

moved: "brooded" as a bird on its nest. Cf. Milton: "On the watery calm His brooding wings the Spirit of God outspread."

Verses 3-5. 1st Day. Light created, i.e. condition of life and order.

God said: i.e. Creation is by the omnipotent word.

good: corresponding to the Divine idea.

Verses 6-8. 2nd Day. The Firmament.

Verse 6. *firmament*: like something beaten out, a firm and solid expanse. It was a vaulted arch on which rested the waters above. The waters above

were the source of rain which came down through “windows” in the firmament. The waters below were the “great deep” from which the sea and floods arose and by which the earth was supported.

Verses 9–13. 3rd Day. The earth and vegetation.

Verse 11. Three kinds of vegetation—grass, the larger plants like cereals, and trees.

Verses 14–19. 4th Day. Luminaries.

in the firmament: i.e. fastened to it, as lamps. *to divide*, etc. These lights had three uses: (1) to be “signs,” i.e. foretelling weather or unusual occurrences; (2) “seasons,” i.e. for fixing times, months, and weeks, periods of agriculture, sacred Festivals and the four seasons; and (3) “days and years,” determining their length and succession.

Verses 20–23. 5th Day. Birds and fishes.

Verse 20. Literally, “let the waters swarm with swimming things” (Driver).

in the open firmament: i.e. in front of the firmament.

Verses 24–31. 6th Day. Animals and man.

Verse 24. Three classes of animals; “cattle” or large quadrupeds, then reptiles, and finally wild animals (“beasts of the earth”).

Verse 26. Crowning act of Creation, the making of Man, introduced by the solemn formula “Let us make man.”

us: probably the plural of majesty, a common usage.

image: man has a reasonable soul which distinguishes him from the other animals, and is the basis of his fellowship with God and of all his

greatness, as well as of his “ dominion over the creatures ” (see Ps. 8 and Heb. 2⁵⁻⁹).

Verse 29. Food for the creatures, the seed and fruit of the trees for man ; the leafage for other animals. Man was a vegetarian by Divine appointment till the Deluge.

Chapter ii. 1-3. Institution of the Sabbath.

Verse 2. *rested* : i.e. desisted. The idea is a rest day between the Creation and the providential activity of God.

C. The Lesson

First, picture the “ beginning ” of things. There were three things existing: First, a chaos of waters with the unformed earth concealed in their depths ; second, darkness ; and third, the brooding Spirit of God ready for the Divine work.

Next, show how under the action of God order came and life and beauty. The first three days were preparation, the second three accomplishment. Note how they correspond.

<i>Days.</i>	<i>Works.</i>	<i>Days.</i>	<i>Works</i>
1st.	Light.	4th.	Luminaries.
2nd.	Firmament dividing waters	5th.	Birds and fishes in the firmament and waters.
3rd.	Dry land and vegetation.	6th.	Animals and man.
7th Day. God's rest.			

It is very easy to show the whole ancient conception of the universe which underlies this account of Creation in a single picture.

1. *What is it that we find in the first chapter of Genesis?* It is an ancient tradition, giving us the belief of the Hebrews about the beginning of the world. They thought the firmament was a solid vault. Above it were the waters from which rain descended through



the "windows" in the firmament (Gen. 7¹¹; Isa. 24¹⁸). The sun, moon and stars were fixed to the firmament, which was supported on pillars or mountains at the ends of the world (Job 26¹¹). The earth was flat, and in the centre of it lay Sheol, the place of departed spirits. The earth rested on the Great Deep and was surrounded by the seas.

2. Where did this story of Creation come from ? The Hebrews brought it with them from Chaldea. But God's spirit purified the old story of all that was foolish and imperfect in it, and made it into this glorious poem of Creation which we now have in Genesis.

3. *Is it true?* It contains the truth which was believed at that time. Science to-day has given us a different, and in some ways a grander, thought of Creation. But it must be clearly understood (1) that God used the knowledge of each age in Bible times, and through it He revealed His own truth, and (2) that God did not make known to these ancient Hebrews the scientific truth which men have found later by earnest inquiry. Indeed, it ought to be made plain that the Bible was not written to give us science, but to reveal God and His nature and will.

4. *What then is its meaning?* The first chapter of Genesis was written, then, not to instruct us about science, but to impress on us certain great truths. These are (1) that God is behind everything. Beauty, order, fertility, life and its fullness, are His work. He gives the rain and the sunshine, the flowers and the harvest. God is the Heavenly Giver, because He is love. (2) The greatest of all God's creatures is Man. He made us like Himself, able to know Him and love Him and serve Him. This is what distinguishes us from other creatures. And He means us to live with Him, and to help Him to make the world better.

II. THE GARDEN OF EDEN THE FRUIT OF DISOBEDIENCE GENESIS 2 and 3

A. For the Teacher

1. The two narratives. The second narrative of the Creation differs in many ways from the first: in its *purpose*, because the aim of this story is to narrate the Fall, and the creation of man and his original condition are told simply by way of preparation: in its *nature* also, because the second narrative is full of human qualities, warmth, colour, and intimacy. God appears in human guise, walking, talking, breathing. This narrative is evidently from a different hand.
2. It is impossible to learn its source. All peoples have such stories about the beginnings of things, and very likely this legend came with the Hebrews from their original home.
3. The story traces the origin of many human institutions like marriage, clothes, language, sex, and agriculture.
4. Note the deep moral earnestness of the author, and the profound truth he sets forth. "This chapter was written by a master of the human heart. He had been deeply impressed by the sorrow of life, the endless toil of man, the pain of woman, the death which lies at the end for all, and here he seeks to explain how all these things came to be" (McFadyen). He uses the ancient legend for this purpose, but it is only the means for a profound revelation of truth.

B. Notes

Chapter ii. 8. *garden*: rather park. The Greek version of the O.T. translates “Paradise.” Hence the use of this term for Eden. Paradise was a Persian pleasure park.

Eden. An early name for the plain of Babylonia.

Verse 9. The garden is full of trees, and man is to live by them.

Verses 10–14. *The irrigation of the garden*. A river rose in Eden *outside* the garden, passed through the garden, watering it, and then, as it issued from the garden, became the head of four streams which each took its own course (Driver).

Verse 11. *Havilah*: part of Arabia.

Verse 12. *bdellium*: “an aromatic gum which oozes from a shrub in the desert of Arabia” (Glazebrook).

Verse 13. *Cush*: i.e. Ethiopia.

Verse 14. *Hiddekel*, the Tigris.

Verse 18. *Help meet*: i.e. a help suitable for him. The word “helpmeet” is an absurdity.

Verse 20. None of the animals is found “meet” for Adam.

Verses 21–22. The need is satisfied by woman. The “rib” is an allegory of the close connection of woman with man and her dependence on him.

Chapter iii. 1. The *serpent*: a serpent, and not, in this story, an embodiment or symbol of Satan.

Verse 7. *fig leaves*: they are the largest leaves on Palestine trees.

Verse 24. *Cherubims.* These were creatures of composite shape who were regarded as guardians of sacred things and places. They were closely identified with the Deity

C. The Lesson

The aim of the lesson is to show the result of disobedience to conscience and to God, and this is led up to dramatically by the stages of the narrative. These stages should be the guide in teaching, as shown below. At the same time it should be clearly shown that even at the worst there is always the promise of Divine redemption for man in his greatest need (3¹⁵).

1. *Innocence.* The beautiful primitive life of happiness in work and love. This happiness lasts as long as a man is faithful. There is always a law to be obeyed and evil to be avoided ; and the voice that says to us “ Do not do that ” is meant for our good. So long as we obey it we are happy.

2. *Disobedience.* What the story shows us is the danger of tampering with evil. For one thing, all temptation is like a serpent, fascinating and stealthy in its approach. Note the artfulness of the tempter. He sows doubts and suspicions. “ Is this so very wrong after all ? Will it not really give me pleasure ? Why should God forbid what is so nice ? ” For another thing, we tamper with evil when we are curious about it. There is good curiosity and bad ; and the bad leads on to evil acts. Avoid evil instead of looking at it. Eve fell ; she tampered with evil and this led to disobedience to conscience, which is the voice of God.

3. *Punishment.* Notice how Adam and Eve tried to

excuse themselves by blaming others. This was futile. God pressed their guilt on them. No excuses can make wrongdoing right. Also, notice that they tried to escape from the consequences of their act. This is impossible. They follow us up, and punishment is inevitable. Notice, finally, that punishment came to each of the evil-doers : to the serpent, to the woman, and to the man. Sin *always* brings misery and suffering.

4. *Redemption.* Yet there is always hope for those who turn to God. There is always the promise of victory over evil by God's help (3¹⁵). This has been fulfilled in Christ, but the promise is to all who look to God.

5. The story then tells us that disobedience to God's will brings unhappiness and suffering, but that God is ready to help all who look to Him, He is not a hard taskmaster, but a Father and a Friend ; this is proved by many examples. Look at a bad man like Jacob whom God made into a good man. Look at Peter who denied Christ. Think of the story of Gough, the drunkard who became a great temperance worker and a saviour of drunkards. When he was at the lowest depth from drink a friend put his hand on his shoulder and said a kind word to him that was his salvation. And think of our own experience. We *know* that we are happy when we obey God and we are unhappy when we disobey. This is not sometimes, but always. Dr. R. J. Campbell tells the following story. In a working man's home the mother was cutting a loaf of bread and weeping while she did so. Her eldest boy asked her why she wept, and she told him that his father had been dismissed from his job because he had refused to tell

a lie. "But," she added, "I hope you will turn out like him." And the boy, who later told the story to Dr. Campbell, said: "I have tried to do it. And I would not barter our quietness of heart for all the world could give."

III. THE FLOOD RETRIBUTION OF LOVE GENESIS 6-9

A. For the Teacher

1. There is no better example in the O.T. of how ancient history was written. It was a compilation. Here are two narratives of the Flood, side by side, and it is difficult to form a consistent story out of them. Two accounts of the number of animals (6¹⁸⁻²² and 7⁻⁵), two accounts of entering into the ark (7⁶⁻⁹ and 7¹³⁻¹⁶), two introductions (6⁵⁻⁸ and 6⁹⁻¹³). The narrative of Genesis is like a rope whose separate strands have been put together but are still visible.

2. The narrative regards the Flood as universal. But this is impossible.

Historically it is impossible, for the elaborate civilizations which existed before this time could not have been wiped off the earth, and new and great civilizations built up out of three families in so brief a period.

Scientifically it is impossible, for the earth would require to have been covered to a depth of miles with water.

Physically it is impossible. The ark could not have contained more than a small proportion of the animal

life of the world ; the conditions requisite for their health could not have been supplied, animals from remote parts could not have been brought so far and could not have got home. It is obvious then that this story is a reminiscence of a local flood, a tradition such as exists among many other peoples. (See Frazer's *Folk Lore of the Old Testament*, chap. 4.)

3. The *origin* of our Bible legend is obvious. It is in all respects extremely like the Babylonian legend which was discovered by George Smith in 1872. The command to build an ark, the grounding of the ship on the mountain, the sending out of a dove, a swallow, and a raven, the sacrifice after the flood, all are there. The Babylonian story is printed in Driver's *Genesis*.

4. This is a difficult story for the teacher. There is perhaps no part of the O.T. which has done so much to create in Christian minds an imperfect idea of God, the idea that He is waiting always to punish faults, that all calamities and "accidents" are sent by Him as retribution for some failure small or great. The idea of God in this narrative is primitive. He is arbitrary and extreme in His severity and indiscriminate in His punishments. Hence great care needs to be taken to show that, while retribution for real sin is a fact, God is not a cruel Being waiting an opportunity to pounce on us ; but a loving Father waiting to bless. Also, it is essential to make it clear that troubles, calamities and "accidents" are not sent by God as punishments, but are trials (often due to men) through which we are to be made strong.

B. Notes

Chapter vi. 6. *repented*: clear anthropomorphism, i.e. a way of thinking of God in human terms as though He were a man. The meaning is that God's purpose was frustrated and therefore a different way had to be taken.

Verse 13. *the end*: i.e. I am resolved to end it.

Verse 14. *ark*. The word is used only here and of Moses' ark of bulrushes.

gopher: cypress.

rooms: cells. The ark was to consist of rows of cells for animals in three stories.

Verse 15. *cubit*: 18 inches. Therefore the ark was 450 ft. long by 75 broad by 45 high.

Verse 16. *light*: a casement round the ark below the roof.

To a cubit: probably the casement was 18 in. high.

Chapter vii. 2. *Clean and unclean*: i.e. ceremonially, cf. Lev. 11: seven of the former because used for food and sacrifice.

Verses 10, 11. *Beginning of Flood*. *2nd month*: November, beginning of rainy season in Palestine.

great deep: i.e. subterranean waters (see diagram, Lesson I). The Flood was caused by (1) rushing up of waters from the "great deep" and (2) rain from the waters above the firmament.

Verses 17-24. *Progress and results of Flood*.

Chapter viii. 1-3. *Decrease of Flood*: the great deep restrained and windows of the firmament closed.

Verses 4, 5. The ark lands. *Ararat* is not one mountain but the hilly region forming part of modern

Armenia. This must have been lofty because “though the waters decreased continually it was not till 73 days after the ark rested on it that the tops of ordinary mountains became visible” (Driver).

Verse 13. The earth dry after one year and eleven days of flood.

Chapter ix. 8-17. *God's covenant with Noah.*

Verse 13. *I do set my bow:* the token of the Promise. This as it stands is an example of naive science, for the laws of light were in existence before Noah, and therefore the rainbow also. The R.V. margin reads “I have set,” and this would mean that the rainbow, while always there, is now to be taken as a token for the future. In any case, a beautiful symbol of Divine grace.

C. *The Lesson*

1. The point of departure. The rainbow, familiar to children and always wonderful, a symbol of Hope, the sun shining through the clouds, Hope at the worst. God Himself on a famous occasion told us to look on it as a sign of His lovingkindness.

2. The occasion was the Flood. It happened in the plain of Babylonia. It was so great a flood that the story grew up that it covered the whole world. But that was due to the fact that so long ago the size of the world was not known.

3. *Presentation.* (1) This was how the Flood was thought to have come. The Great Waters under the earth surged up, covering the earth, and the windows of heaven were opened so that the rain came down in

torrents. The flood was so terrible that people and animals all died.

(2) One family was saved, that of Noah. The command to build the ark ; description of the ark, its tiers of cells and windows at the top ; the animals, seven and two.

(3) The beginning, progress and decrease of the Flood. The successive birds sent out. What happened to each. The dry land appears.

(4) Exit and sacrifice.

(5) God's promise and its sign.

4. This is not the only story of the Flood. Many nations have one. The Greeks had a famous one (story of Deucalion). There are stories in Australia and India also.

5. This story shows how much the people long ago had to learn about God. Jesus has taught us that He is a loving Father anxious to help us, and always patient and kind. You are not to think of Him as a hard and cruel Being always looking for a chance to punish. He has to punish evil but He loves to help and save.

Also troubles and calamities are not punishment sent by God. They are often due to our own folly or that of others. But in any case, God does not send sorrow or floods or troubles as a punishment. When they come they are just difficulties we have to face. If we face them bravely they will turn out blessings.

But all the same, it is true that evil doing is visited by God with punishment just as well doing is rewarded with happiness. Sin always brings suffering ; not now and again, but always. That is just, and God is always just. Even His love does not prevent His visiting real

sin with real punishment, but sin's punishment is one of the ways by which God in His love seeks to overcome evil.

IV. ABRAHAM'S EMIGRATION

A GREAT PIONEER

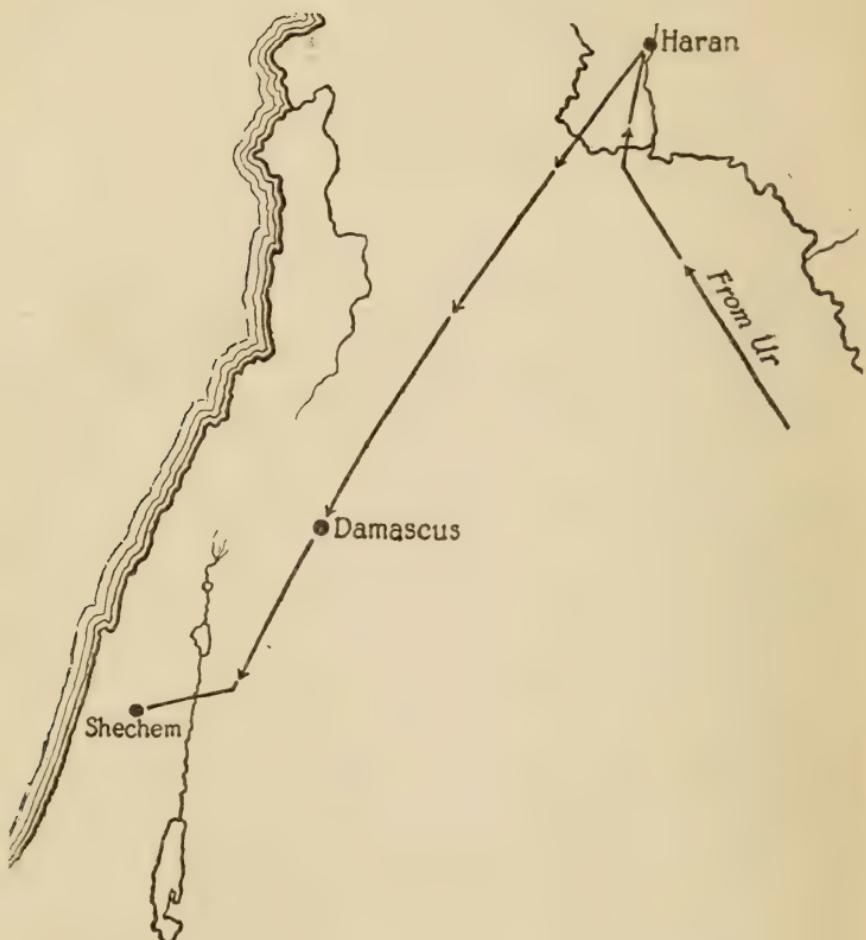
GENESIS 11²⁷–12⁹

A. For the Teacher

1. Here we emerge from the twilight of legend and myth to the comparative light of history. It is not scientific history, with its exclusive regard for accuracy in detail, but ancient history, the traditions of the tribe, substantially true, but mainly concerned with the meaning and lessons of events. (1) The picture of the Eastern life of the typical sheik is vivid and real ; and (2) the meaning of religion, of faith, of fellowship with God, is actual and true for all time.

2. The teacher must above all realize that this is one of the great events of history, not a mere "Bible story" but an event with tremendous issues. It was the beginning of the history of the Jews. It was the beginning of that course of events which led to Jesus Christ. It was the source of three great religions, Judaism, Mohammedanism, and Christianity. And therefore this journey was one of the most momentous of all the adventurous journeys in history. Far greater than those of Columbus, the Pilgrim Fathers, or Livingstone.

5. The route must be clearly visualized. A sketch on the blackboard will enable the older pupils to follow it. Abraham left Ur and travelled up to Haran along



ABRAHAM'S JOURNEY.

the Euphrates. There he waited till his father died, when he started afresh, and going by Damascus came down the east side of the Jordan to the ford 25 miles from the Dead Sea, where he crossed the Jordan and arrived at Shechem.

This is the oldest road in the world and has been the scene of many famous journeys in war and peace.

B. Notes

Chapter xi. 28. *Ur*: an ancient city on the right bank of the Euphrates, an important place in its time commercially.

Chaldees: a tribe of lower Babylonia and at one time the ruling element in Babylonia. Abraham was a Chaldee and therefore shared their superstitions until he came to know the true God. This must be carefully remembered.

Verse 31. *Haran*: the chief place in the country which was Abraham's second home. Jacob came back to it and Isaac's wife was sought here among "his own people." It was the stopping-place of Abraham and the fresh starting-point in his emigration.

Chapter xii. 1-3. The Divine call—the Divine side of the event.

The Lord said. How? We do not know. How did the revelation come to Abraham? Perhaps as it comes to us, in his mind.

out of: the severe demand. How much he gave up: country, kin, home!

Verses 4, 5. Abraham's obedience. The human side of the event.

Verses 6-9. Abraham's settlement in the land.

Verse 6. *place of Moreh*: rather the terebinth of the soothsayer. The terebinth was a sacred tree at which oracles were given. It was an ancient belief that the rustling of leaves was a common way of showing the Divine mind.

Verse 7. *altar*: the regular way of marking some special religious experience.

Verse 9. *south*: with a capital letter. It is the district bordering the desert, the last cultivated land southwards.

C. The Lesson

1. *The Point of Contact.* Great journeys in history. Columbus, Captain Cook, Pilgrim Fathers, Livingstone. But here is a greater journey than any ! Why ? Because of its results. The whole history of the Jews came out of it and Christianity and all our present civilization. Let us look at the story then.

2. *The Story.* (1) *The Start.* From Ur, an old city ; Abraham a citizen. When he left he gave up his home, his kindred and country : all that was familiar, dear and solid. Emphasize this. And he went out to a future that was unknown and uncertain. In other words, he made a venture. Why ? Because God's voice commanded him. It was utter obedience. And he went out because he trusted absolutely God's promise to lead him and bless him.

(2) *The Journey.* Trace the course by Haran, the stop at Haran, then the fresh start and journey down by Damascus to Shechem.

(3) *The Goal.* Here Abraham built an altar. Thus he took possession of the land for God and raised the

flag of his new faith. He knew he had arrived where God meant him to be.

3. *The Meaning of the Story.* The essence of Abraham's act was that it was a *venture*. It was a giving away of what is solid and certain for what is uncertain, and this at the call of duty, of the inner voice which bids us go on. How many men have done this!—David Livingstone, for example, and the Pilgrim Fathers and Captain Scott. They obeyed the inner voice at all costs, though it led them they knew not whither. And so, when anyone goes forward in obedience to conscience, giving up possessions for the sake of duty, he is doing what Abraham did.

4. This voice of God may come to us any day. And whenever you obey God's voice in your conscience at any cost you are following in Abraham's track. Telling the truth may cost you something. It may mean giving up an advantage apparently to gain nothing but the sense of doing right. Being honest under temptation may be the same. It is obedience to God's voice, and it always brings a great reward. The great possession in the world is a clean conscience, and the approval of God and a character unstained by dishonour. A young man in a Scottish city rose by his abilities to a high position with a large salary. During the Great War he was asked by his chief to make a false return of income to the Government. He was told that if he refused he would lose his job. He was very anxious to marry, and it was a great temptation, but he refused. He lost his situation and was cast out, "not knowing where he was to go," but he never regretted his act because he kept his conscience clear.

V. LOT AND ABRAHAM

THE GREAT CHOICE

GENESIS 13 (with 18 and 19)

A. For the Teacher

1. This passage is invaluable for religious education, because it sets before the mind so vividly the fact that a choice has to be made in life between good and evil. Nowhere in the Bible are both sides of this eternal alternative so clearly and finely portrayed.

2. But the story bristles with difficulties. It is, e.g., easy to give the impression that righteousness gains a worldly reward in the end. This may be the point of view of the early parts of the Bible, but it is contrary to Bible teaching as a whole and is opposed to experience. Therefore the question must be kept clearly in view throughout: what do we seek, and what do we gain, when we choose the higher? We gain a good conscience, and character, and God.

3. This therefore is clear, that this lesson is for older children. It would be wise to pass it over in teaching children below ten or eleven years of age.

B. Notes

Chapter xiii. 10. They were standing on a hill near Bethlehem, from which a fine view of the region could be got.

plain of Jordan: rather, "the circle of Jordan." This was a name given to the whole region in the Jordan valley from Jericho down to the south of the Dead Sea. It was a very fertile region, but tropical in its climate

like the garden of the Lord : i.e. the Garden in Eden irrigated by the river.

like the land of Egypt : irrigated by the Nile. Both plains were famed for fertility.

Verse 18. Abraham moved south to the high ground as far as Hebron, 19 miles south-west of Jerusalem. *Hebron*, so identified with Abraham that the modern name in Arabic means “the town of the Friend of God.” It was later an important city of Judah and the seat of David’s kingdom for some years.

C. The Lesson

1. Point of Contact. Describe an ordinary incident in a child’s life, when he has to make a moral choice ; between two sweets, e.g., one big, the other little, when there are two to enjoy the sweets. What kind of boy chooses the bigger ? and what kind of boy chooses the less ?

2. Well, here is a story in which there was such a choice. There were two men. They were prosperous, and as their prosperity grew their herds of cattle increased so that there was not room for both. They soon had to separate. But who was to choose the best land for grazing and water ? The older man, Abraham, had the right to choose, for all the prosperity was due to him, and Lot, who was his nephew, owed everything to his uncle Abraham. But Abraham, though the older, gave up his right and said to Lot, “Do you choose. Take the land you wish.” And Lot seized the chance, and chose the best grazing land, though he knew that the people who lived there were evil people. His conduct was selfish and greedy, while Abraham was unselfish and magnanimous.

3. We have many parallels to this incident both in the Bible and outside. There was Moses who refused to become "the son of Pharaoh's daughter" and chose to suffer poverty and persecution with his own people (Heb. 11²⁴⁻²⁶; Exod. 2¹¹⁻¹⁵). There was Paul, who gave up a great position as a scholar and ruler and became a poor worker for Christ. These were like Abraham. Like Lot were the rich young ruler, Esau and Demas. Outside the Bible we have the "choice of Hercules" in classic story. We have the example of Dr. John Cairns, who refused the position of Principal of the Edinburgh University to remain a simple preacher of the gospel, and that of Charles Wesley who, for the same reason, rejected the proposal of a wealthy relative to adopt him as his heir. And on the other side, we have Cardinal Wolsey and Macbeth. Tell the incident of the Man with the Muck Rake in the *Pilgrim's Progress*.

4. The same choice comes before us in many ways, e.g. when we are tempted to dishonesty with the prospect of gain; when we are tempted to be selfish and grasp something for ourselves to the loss of others; above all, in thinking of our career in the world. The question we have to ask ourselves is: What are we to seek? When we choose to be honest at a cost, we are really choosing a good conscience and upright character. This is the reward of honesty. When we choose to be unselfish, we are choosing to be like Christ. When we think of our career, what are we to seek? Gain? position? fame? There is something better than these. Service: this is the better choice. All work and every career are to be an opportunity of making the world a little better. And our reward is the truest happiness and God Himself.

VI. SACRIFICE OF ISAAC

A NEW THOUGHT OF GOD

GENESIS 22¹⁻¹⁹

A. For the Teacher

1. This story should be taught only to children over 11 years of age. It is impossible to explain it to younger children.

2. The purpose of the story seems clearly to be to teach a higher and better thought of God, that He does not desire human sacrifice. Dr. Peake (*Commentary*) doubts this, but it must be remembered that the narrative was written about 1,200 years after the event, at a time when this higher conception of God's demand in sacrifice, that it is the offering of our *will*, was expressed by the prophets. It must be made clear to the pupils that here we get one of those steps forward in the knowledge of God's nature and will of which the O.T. is a record.

3. Abraham came from a land where the practice of human sacrifice was prevalent. It was common also among his neighbours. The Hebrews practised it now and later (Judges 11³⁹, 1 Kings 16³). The Moabites practised it (2 Kings 3²⁷). The Sepharvites practised it (2 Kings 17³¹). Therefore it was *natural* for Abraham to look on it as the right way to express his devotion to God. He proposed to give up the very best he had. This was the good element in the practice of human sacrifice.

4. The story ought to be made to turn entirely round Abraham, not Isaac. Abraham's were the problem, the

suffering, the joy of discovery. Therefore this incident should not be used as a type of the sacrifice of Christ.

B. Notes

Verse 1. *tempt* : this means "test" or "prove."

Verse 2. *Moriah* : generally supposed to be Jerusalem ; but this is doubtful.

Verse 6. *the fire*. In the days when there were no matches or even flint and steel, fire was carried with the traveller.

Verse 14. *Jehovah-jireh* : i.e. Jehovah seeth and provideth, sees and provides for the wants of His people.

C. The Lesson

1. *Point of Contact.* What is your most precious possession ? A cycle ? stamps ? books ? If you were asked to give it up, without hope of getting another, it would be a trial. But think of a parent's most precious possession. It is his child. If it is an only child it is doubly precious. And to give it up would be a severe trial. Well, here is a story about such a trial.

2. *Read the Story.* Do not attempt to paraphrase it. The narrative is so simple and beautiful that it ought to be given just as it is.

3. This story raises some difficult questions.

(1) The narrator tells us that God told Abraham that he was to offer up his son as a sacrifice. But we are sure that God could not give such a command to a father. How, then, could the writer attribute it to God ? The answer is simple. If you were sure a cer-

tain thing was your duty, you would naturally believe it was God's will, and you could quite rightly say, "God told me to do this." All through the O.T. we have commands attributed to God which were really acts which people felt to be right for them to do. They were sometimes wrong in thinking God commanded the thing, but, if they felt the thing to be right, they naturally believed it to be God's will.

(2) But how could Abraham imagine this thing to be right ? The answer to this is simple also. The sacrifice of a child to God was practised everywhere at this time. People offered the best thing they had to their god to purchase his favour, avert a calamity, or show their devotion. And Abraham might well say to himself, "If these people can show their devotion in that way, am I to be behind them in giving up my most precious possession ?" This was a fine thought, though Abraham was mistaken in thinking that such a sacrifice would please God.

We can see then how the idea would occur to Abraham, why he would think it to be his duty, and therefore how he could think it to be God's command. What then was he taught when the sacrifice was stopped ? And what was the incident meant to teach us ?

(1) Abraham was taught a new thought about God, that God does not desire human sacrifice, but that He wishes a different kind of sacrifice. The O.T. shows us how bit by bit the knowledge of God came to the world. There was always some new truth about God being given in Israel. Israel had to learn the truth about God stage by stage, as children learn at school always new knowledge. Here was a new step forward in the knowledge of God.

(2) What, then, is the sacrifice God desires? It is simply the offering of our best. Sacrifice means "the best for God." And what is the best? It is obedience. It is our *will*. It is what we are as well as what we have. It is our duty to give the best we have to God. This may mean our life or our dearest possession. In the Great War many a poor woman gave her only son to go and fight for her country. In the same war, Nurse Cavell gave her life. The Lord Jesus Christ gave His life on the Cross. Many a missionary gives up comfort and home and friends to go and serve Christ among the heathen. Some brave men have given up their career of ambition to support a mother and young brothers and sisters. This is what the story before us teaches us, that for the sake of duty, in the service of God, in the service of the weak or needy, we ought to be ready to give up our most precious possessions, if that be demanded. The best for God, and in God's service, which is the service of duty.

VII. THE WOOING OF REBEKAH

GOD IN OUR LIFE

GENESIS 24

A. For the Teacher

1. Note the perfect literary beauty and skill of the narrative. Weave as much as possible of its language into the story as you tell it.
2. The story is interesting because it reflects some of the immemorial customs of the East. The marriage was arranged without reference to the two persons

most concerned, though Rebekah's consent was formally asked. Also the money given to Rebekah's relatives was a relic of the time when wives were bought.

3. The main lesson to be left on the mind of the child is a little difficult to choose here. We might take the picture of maidenhood suggested in the story. If the teacher chooses this he will observe the character represented in the picture of Rebekah ; beauty, industry, purity, and kindness. Matthew Arnold takes Rebekah as his ideal of stainless maidenhood :

" What girl
Now reads in her bosom as clear
As Rebekah read, when she sate
At even by the palm-shaded well ?
Who guards in her breast
As deep, as pellucid a spring
Of feeling, as tranquil, as sure ? "

But this is not the obvious lesson of the story, which clearly shows the hand of God in human affairs as illustrated by the choice of a wife for Isaac, a matter of great moment for the future development of God's purpose.

B. Notes

Verse 3. The Canaanites were hated by the Hebrews (Gen. 9²⁵, Josh. 23¹²). Marriage with them meant (1) losing that purity of race which it was one object of the Hebrews to preserve, and (2) risking that purity of the religion which went with the former. On both grounds Isaac must be preserved from such entanglement.

Verse 4. *my country* : i.e. not Ur but Haran, Abraham's second home, where many of his relations were settled.

Verse 11. It was the duty of women then, as now, in the East to draw water.

Verses 12-14. Outward signs or omens were the primitive way by which God's will could be found ; cf. Gideon's fleece, the casting of lots, the use of the ephod.

Verse 22. *half a shekel of gold* : about equal to a sovereign.

Verse 47. *upon her face*, upon her nose ; a ring of metal passed through the right nostril is often worn by women in the East (Driver).

Verse 53. Presents are an essential element in betrothal in the East.

Precious things were really the money given to the bride's relatives, a relic of the purchase price paid when wives were bought.

Verse 65. *a veil* : women were veiled between betrothal and marriage.

C. The Lesson

1. The obvious point of contact here is a marriage in modern times, which most children have either seen or heard of. The customs were different in Bible times and in the East. Here is a description of how a wife was wooed and won in the time of Abraham.

2. *The Story told.* This is essentially a story lesson. The steps or successive "mental pictures" which the teacher ought to have before his mind are very distinct : (1) Abraham's instructions to his faithful steward (¹⁻⁹) ; (2) the steward's faithful conduct (¹⁰⁻¹⁴) ; (3) the maiden Rebekah, and her kindness (¹⁵⁻²⁸) ; (4) the hospitality of the East (²⁹⁻³³) ; (5) the steward tells

his story (³⁴⁻⁴⁸); (6) the betrothal, with the presents given (⁴⁹⁻⁶⁰); and (7) the meeting of Isaac and Rebekah and their wedding.

3. The lesson of the whole narrative is that God ought to be brought into all our life. Probably this truth can best be taught by being wrought into the telling of the story and not as an application at the end, e.g. in describing the steward's carrying out of Abraham's instructions, his prayer has to be noticed. This is the best point at which to teach the lesson. Prayer is just referring *everything* to God, and bringing God into our daily life, its duties and interests and pleasures. At every point the steward consulted God and asked to be guided. He was just doing his duty, but he did it along with God; and that is religion. It is a very good opportunity of showing that religion ought to be natural and not something reserved for Sunday but mixed up with the commonest things in everyday existence. Notice how, for *all* the people in this story, the decisive thing about this marriage is God's hand in it.

VIII. JACOB AND ESAU

WHAT GOD CAN DO

GENESIS 25²⁷⁻³⁴, 27, 32, and 33

A. For the Teacher

1. The real interest of this part of the narrative lies in the contrasted characters and conduct of the two brothers. The task of the teacher is to present them vividly and to sketch the development of their relation-

ships. That is why all the passages are taken together. What they were, and how they showed themselves in actual tests, and what became of them, this is all the one story.

2. The problem in the child's mind is how the conduct of Jacob (whom God chose) can be reconciled with a Christian standard or, indeed, any decent standard. The solution is, of course, that God could only teach right conduct gradually. In these early days men regarded such "smartness" as Jacob's as admirable. The story would often be told by the Hebrews with zest of how their ancestor got the better of his rivals. Christ has taught us better, but there are many people to-day with the same morality as Jacob's, so difficult is it for God to lead men to know the right.

3. While not in the least palliating Jacob's dishonesty, it is important to show that he is by far the bigger man and with great possibilities in him for the future. Attention should be concentrated on the fact that it is not our natural character that matters but what we make of it with all our helps and opportunities.

4. It is not really important for the teacher, but it may be noted that all the authorities draw attention to the fact that these two men in their characters and destiny prefigure the qualities and future of their tribes, Israel and Edom. (See Peake, p. 156.)

B. Notes

Chapter xxv. 27. *cunning* : i.e. skilful.
plain : rather "quiet," settled.

Verse 30. literally "feed me with that red, red"—i.e. stuff.

Verse 31. *birthright*. The birthright was really the position of leadership in the tribe and carried a larger inheritance with it. Hence its value.

Verse 34. *lentils* : “cultivated everywhere in the East ; usually stewed with onions, rice and oil, or small bits of meat and fat, seasoned to the taste” (Driver).

Chapter xxvii. 4. A father’s blessing was believed to carry with it a magical, or, at any rate, an effective power to bring good. Probably Isaac (and Esau) hoped to undo the harm of the sale of the birth-right by the solemn blessing.

Verse 28. *dew*. In the dry and hot summer the heavy dew condensed in the cool nights was priceless for the land. Hence the use of this symbol of blessing.

corn and wine : staple products of Canaan.

Chapter xxxii. 2. *Mahanaim* : two camps, his own and that of the angels of God.

C. The Lesson

Twins are not only like each other but are generally devoted to one another and inseparable. Not so with this pair. They were as unlike as possible, and from the beginning were always against one another.

1. They had different natures. Esau was impulsive, frank, generous, careless, weak. Jacob was cautious, cunning, grasping, strong and patient. Esau a man of the open air, Jacob a stay-at-home. Esau sensuous, Jacob intellectual. You naturally prefer Esau ? But note, Jacob was a far bigger man and cared for far bigger and better things than Esau.

2. These characteristics came out in two incidents.

We are always revealing ourselves in common incidents, especially when they are unexpected.

(1) *The Birthright.* Its value Jacob saw, though Esau was too blind and foolish to realize it. Note that the real sinner in this incident, according to the narrative, is Esau. Jacob's conduct, however, was very bad ; it was clever, unscrupulous, grasping, mean.

(2) *The Blessing* (27). Jacob's conduct—his lying, his hypocrisy, his dishonesty—as bad as possible. But note his ability, and his courage in carrying the thing through. ("I would have dropped the dish and run," said Luther.) You condemn the clever scoundrel, but you can't help seeing how much bigger a man he is than Esau.

3. Now see what followed. Jacob, as the result of his conduct, was driven into exile. He never saw his mother again. On the way he had a wonderful vision of God at Bethel and God became more a reality to him. He married in exile, and after many years came home only to hear that Esau was coming to meet him. Once again he triumphed over Esau by sheer cleverness. He sent many rich presents to Esau before he met him in person, and thus turned away his anger. But his life was one of many sorrows and trials. He lost those who were dearest to him by death, and his family were a source of great trouble to him. But through all this, and through his fellowship with God, Jacob was gradually purified and became a better man.

4. For older classes there might well be a discussion of the real point of this story of contrasted characters. It is not what we are by nature that determines our future and our service to the world, but what, by God's

help, we make of ourselves. See the many kinds of natures there are in the world. Boys and girls of all sorts and sizes ; their natural make-up provides their own task and their own opportunity. God's grace made a good man of Jacob. God used trouble and sorrow as a sculptor uses his chisel to mould a figure. God can make something good and great out of any of us. This is the great lesson of the story of Jacob and Esau. The difference between them was that Jacob gave himself to God and allowed God to shape him. We are not *bound* to be lazy or dishonest or greedy or liars. God can help us to make good.

IX. JACOB AT BETHEL

GOD OUR COMRADE

GENESIS 28

A. For the Teacher

1. The purpose of this narrative is to explain how the sanctuary at Bethel, so famous later on, got its sacred character. Bethel was one of the great sanctuaries in Israel. It was here Amos appeared to deliver his message (7¹³). Tithes were paid at Bethel to the priests. And all this was accounted for by Jacob's vision.

2. The narrative is full of primitive ideas. Heaven is a place just above Bethel with a gate and a staircase by which angels who visit the earth go up and down. The setting up of the pillar was a customary religious act, for in the oldest times the deity was supposed to reside in a sacred stone. The vow Jacob made was

also a primitive custom. It was a kind of bargain with God for protection and blessing, in return for which Jacob would give a tithe of his possessions. The idea of revelations through dreams is also very ancient. (See Notes below.)

3. In spite of this, however, the religious meaning of the story is very simple and beautiful. In expounding it the teacher should make use of St. John 1⁵¹, and the hymn "Nearer, my God, to Thee," or the famous Scottish paraphrase, "O God of Bethel."

B. Notes

Verse 10. The route from Beersheba to Haran passes through Luz, which is 10 miles north of Jerusalem.

Verse 11. *the stones of the place.* The valley is a mass of stones, some of them standing up, and a hill to the south-east rises in a terrace of stones (Driver).

Verse 12. *dreamed.* Dreams in primitive times were regarded as a sure means of revelation of God's will. Cf. Joseph's dreams, and Pharaoh's and Solomon's.

a ladder: rather a staircase.

angels: here without wings because they used the staircase.

Verse 13. *above it*: rather "beside him." Jehovah appears at his side to give the promise of help.

Verse 16. *knew it not.* Jacob is surprised at God's appearing at a place which is not sacred. It is the first hint of a truth to be revealed later, that God is everywhere.

Verse 18. *pillar*: a monolith was the mark of a sacred place. Stones were regarded as the abode of deity.

It was customary to pour oil on such a stone as a consecration. In India every village has its fetish stone (Driver).

C. The Lesson

1. *Introduction.* In the last lesson we saw how much evil there was in Jacob's character. He was clever and patient and far-seeing, but he was mean, treacherous, a liar and a cheat. In to-day's lesson we see how it was he became a better man, and how this evil was purged out of his nature. It was because he came to know God and to give himself to God.

2. *The Story.* This is what happened. The story is to be told in vivid pictures. There are six of these "steps" in the narrative. (1) Jacob is sent away with his father's blessing to get a wife at Haran among his own kinsfolk. (2) Travelling by the great road north he comes to Luz, 10 miles north of Jerusalem, the valley of stones. The terrace of stones on a little hill: this is what he sees as he closes his eyes in the starry eastern night. (3) Naturally the scenery appears in his dreams. He sees in his dream what his eyes had lighted on as he fell asleep, the staircase and the angels. Heaven very near and God beside him speaking to him and giving him a great promise. (4) On awaking Jacob perceives the meaning of the dream. God has really appeared to him. This beautiful hillside is sacred. It is the house of God. God is here. And God will be with him wherever he goes. (5) To mark this great discovery Jacob sets up a sacred stone and pours oil on it as an offering. Henceforth this place will be sacred to him because God has appeared to him here.

(6) Finally he gives himself to God in a solemn vow. It is not an ideal vow, but it was a real promise to serve God, and this was a great deal for Jacob.

5. What is the meaning of this for us? What places are sacred with us to-day? Churches. They are set apart for worship. God appears in them to those who seek Him. But are they the only sacred places, the only places where God appears to men? No, He may come to us on a bare hill-side or on the street or in our home. He is always with us. He is our Comrade. Jesus Christ has brought Him very near to us. We see God in Jesus. We know from Jesus how close God is to us. And if we try to serve Him and obey Him He will help us and show Himself to us every day. This is what the great hymn "*Nearer, my God, to Thee*," says to us. Read the *Reverie of Poor Susan*, by Wordsworth, in which a poor girl hears the song of a thrush in a London street, and the dusty thoroughfare becomes the gate of heaven. "*She looks, and her heart is in heaven.*"

X. JOSEPH THE DREAMER

A BOY'S AMBITIONS

GENESIS 37

A. For the Teacher

1. The remaining section of Genesis is almost entirely occupied with the career of Joseph. This is one of the finest parts of the book. As a story it is almost unequalled. Tolstoi takes it as a model of what story-telling should be. For the background of "*local colour*," see Mr. Robert Bird's *Joseph the Dreamer*

2. One difficulty in teaching is the obvious presence side by side of two accounts from which one narrative has been compiled. Reuben (²¹) is the hero of one, Judah (²⁶) of the other. But the two have been dovetailed with some skill and it is not impossible to form a coherent story.

3. The central theme of the whole biography is the over-ruling Providence of God, and this should be kept in view in the teaching.

4. In primitive times God was supposed to make His will known through outward signs (omens), like the lot, or "inward mental phenomena," like dreams. Modern psychology has revived this idea in a different form. The true self is supposed to be revealed in dreams, and of old it was the true self, deep down below consciousness, to which and through which God was believed to reveal His purposes. Hence the anger of Joseph's brothers at his dreams.

B. Notes

Verse 3. *coat of many colours*. It is a pity to destroy the mental picture of Joseph's garment which is so common. It was, however, simply "a garment with long sleeves," (margin) and was not worn by people who had to work, because the sleeves and the length made this difficult. It was therefore a sign of superiority. "Many colours" is a mis-translation.

Verse 12. *Shechem* : where there was fine pasturage.

Verse 17. *Dothan* : where the pasturage is even finer.

Verse 24. *pit*. In the vicinity of Dothan there are underground reservoirs, shaped like a bottle, from which it was impossible to escape. The "bottle

dungeon" at St. Andrews is the kind of thing. They still exist in the neighbourhood.

Verse 25. *spicery*. The merchants were taking spices to Egypt, chiefly for embalming the dead.

Verse 28. *twenty pieces of silver*: i.e. shekels, nearly £3.

Verse 35. *grave*: rather Sheol, the abode of departed spirits, thought to be situated at the heart of the earth.

C. The Lesson

1. *The Unhappy Home Life*. It was not a happy home. There was constant quarrelling. The reasons were partly jealousy on account of Jacob's gross favouritism, partly resentment of Joseph's obvious conceit, and partly anger at Joseph's tale-bearing. Joseph was himself largely to blame. He was something of a prig, and also what in Scotland is called a "clipe" (tale-bearer), a peculiarly offensive type of boy. It was, above all, the dreams that angered the brothers because they seemed to lift Joseph far above them.

2. *How the Dreams Came*. Show how Joseph's constant thought took these particular shapes. He was ambitious, and conscious of superior powers, and continually cherished ambitious ideas. One day in harvesting he lay in the shadow of a sheaf of corn in the noon-day rest and falling asleep he dreamed. Naturally his last waking vision supplied the material of the dream. Later, lying in the shadow of a tent on a hot night he looked up at the glorious eastern sky, and as he fell asleep, his constant thought took shape from what he had seen. He was possessed by a resolute ambition and it found expression in all sorts of ways.

3. *A Check to Ambition* (12-36). Jacob did not realize how savage the feeling of the brothers was, and sent Joseph off on an errand to them. It was his first flight from home, a three-days' camel ride, with nights spent in roadside khans, i.e. inns; very exciting. But Joseph was speedily brought to the ground from his high thoughts for himself, when he arrived at Dothan. Events followed quickly: the fierce dispute as to Joseph's fate—the bottle dungeon—the intervention of Reuben—the sale to the merchants—the abduction to Egypt. “Lincoln had his plans time and again blocked by his father's weakness, his partner's folly, and his enemies' determined opposition. But he kept true to the call of Duty, and so triumphed over every difficulty. Garfield was kept by malarial fever from following out his early ambition of going to sea. But he was guided by his mother to the light of God in books, and thus led to embark on his great career as soldier and statesman.” (A. R. Gordon, *The Enchanted Garden*).

4. *Dreams*. Joseph's dream meant simply that a great thought of his life was resolutely kept before his mind. Lots of examples of this. Story of Alexander the Great; Napoleon (lordship over the world). All these were *selfish* thoughts of personal ambition, like Joseph's. But other dreams—Wilberforce (his life's ambition to free the slaves); Caedmon. These were dreams of a different kind, dreams of service to the world.

Recall Burns' fine lines:—

“I mind it weel in early date,
When I was beardless, young, and blate,
An' first could thresh the barn,
E'en then a wish (I mind its power),
A wish that to my latest hour

Shall strongly heave my breast,
That I for poor auld Scotland's sake
Some usefu' plan or book could make,
Or sing a sang at least."

Tell briefly the story of Quarrier. He was a poor boy, and, while wandering on the streets of Glasgow, ill-clad and hungry, he resolved that, if ever he had money, he would do something for lads like himself. When later he got work as a journeyman he took a room and gathered into it ragged boys whom he fed and furnished with work. Friends gave him money (he never asked for any), and his unselfish labours were extended more and more until to-day we can see the great "Quarrier's Homes" at Bridge of Weir where hundreds of boys and girls are trained for a useful life. This is the result of Quarrier's boyish "dream."

5. Two things Joseph's dreams tell us about such ambitions : (1) We ought to stand fast by our thought and then it will come true, and (2) we ought never to be discouraged by a set-back. Often God's Providence is in the set-back, and it is really part of His plan, as it was in Joseph's case. (3) But the best ambition is the desire to leave a mark on the world for good.

XI. JOSEPH IN PRISON

FAITHFULNESS

GENESIS 39 and 40

A. For the Teacher

For the most part this lesson is "clear sailing," but two things may be said in the way of warning.

1. It is easy to produce the impression that God rewards goodness always with prosperity and that He visits evil-doing always with adversity. This is contrary to the facts of experience. Prosperity comes to the qualities that win it, including honesty and faithfulness. And this is in consequence of the Divine arrangement. But, while a good man is not prosperous merely because of his goodness, it is true that moral integrity is a real factor in promotion, and this may be urged without any false suggestion.

2. The other point arises in connection with Joseph's temptation by Potiphar's wife. Obviously with a younger class this episode must be passed over lightly. But it is otherwise with adolescents. They are at a period of life when temptation in this form is very real, and the passage affords an opportunity of showing what the real defence against temptation is. The part of the lesson dealing with this may therefore be omitted with younger classes.

B. Notes

Chapter xxxix. 1. *Pharaoh*. This is not an individual name. It is like "Kaiser," "Czar," and "the Sublime Porte" applied to the Sultan of Turkey. The ruler of Egypt was "the Pharaoh," which means "Great House."

Chapter xl. 17. *bakemeats* : i.e. pastry.

Verse 19. *hang thee on a tree*, refers, not to death by hanging, which was not practised, but to exposing the dead body of a criminal on a tree for birds to destroy. This was a severe punishment owing to the Egyptian belief that an unmutilated body was

necessary for immortality. Hence the practice of embalming dead bodies.

C. The Lesson

1. The point of departure for this lesson is plainly Joseph's dreams. He had soaring ambitions and the vision of a great future for himself. And all this seemed to be brought to naught when he was sold as a slave into Egypt. But when we look deeper we can see how God was making the worst of his troubles the stepping-stones to greater things. This is Joseph's dark time, when he was tested.

2. The first episode is his life as a slave in Potiphar's house. It was a low condition, and yet here Joseph rose to the top as he always did. And he rose by reason just of his qualities, i.e. of his faithfulness. He was always trusted because he was trustworthy. Describe the steady rise of Joseph till everything was put into his hands. See how the meanest position can be transfigured by the spirit in a man. It is not rank but character that counts. And such honesty and faithfulness as Joseph's are the sure way to promotion in life. Men value such trustworthiness and reward it with honour and trust.

3. The second episode was the false accusation. Joseph was tempted by his master's wife and he resisted the temptation. How did he resist it? Simply because he had something better in his life. Duty, honour and God were his watchwords. He lived by them. And therefore he was proof against this temptation. What overcomes temptation is not struggling against it, but having our hearts garrisoned against it by something

better. Just as fresh air and sunshine fortify the body against disease, so living with good thoughts, good books, good friends, and with God fortifies the soul against evil. Illustrate by Ulysses and Orpheus and the Sirens. The Sirens were fabulous creatures, half-women and half-bird, who dwelt on an island near Sicily and lured voyagers to their death by the beauty of their music. When Ulysses passed he stopped his sailors' ears with wax, and had himself tied to the mast, and so escaped in safety. But when Orpheus passed he so charmed his sailors with the *superior* beauty of his music that they did not feel the attraction of the Sirens.

4. The third episode was the prison life. We have many examples of how a prison can be transfigured: Paul in prison at Rome, his ministry there, and the great letters he wrote; Dante in exile; Bunyan; Milton in his blindness, which was a real prison. So Joseph made his prison into something noble and gracious by two things, his unquenchable courage and his unselfish spirit. His sympathy with others (40^{6, 7}) made him forget his own trouble. "He was no sooner in prison than he discovered how interesting a place a prison could be" (Strahan, *Hebrew Ideals*). Samuel Rutherford was exiled to Aberdeen, and sent his beautiful letters "From Christ's Palace in Aberdeen." He wrote: "Do you know, I thought of Jesus till every stone in the wall of my cell glowed like a ruby."

The worst conditions can be redeemed by such courage and such unselfishness. And indeed one act of kindness on his part led to his release and all his greatness. Again we see (as in 39^{2, 3}) that he rose to the top because of *what he was*.

5. The explanation of it all is found in a phrase four times repeated (39^{2, 3, 21, 23}), “the Lord was with him.” This was the secret of Joseph’s supremacy and of his whole career. It is because of this that what seems most against us turns in the end to good “for those who love Him.” God is able to make all things work together for good for those who like Joseph trust Him and serve Him. David Livingstone’s ambition was to go to China, but the Opium War prevented its fulfilment. In Africa, where his work lay, he was often in dire extremity. He told the students of Glasgow University the secret of his courage in these circumstances. “Shall I tell you what sustained me amidst the toil and hardship and loneliness of my exiled life ? It was the promise, *I am with you always.*”

XII. JOSEPH IN POWER

BROTHERHOOD

GENESIS 41-46

A. For the Teacher

1. This is a story lesson pure and simple. It is one of the most dramatic in the Bible. The sudden rise to power of Joseph, the visits of the brothers, the suspense and agony they endured, the magnificent conduct of Judah, the reconciliation, all make a noble tale. The teacher should therefore be content to tell the story, letting the truth it embodies appear in the telling, and striving only to make the right impression on the children’s minds. The story carries its own moral.

2 There is a danger of confusing two impressions

which compete for prominence. One great lesson of Joseph's elevation is the wonder of Divine Providence, and its methods. The other is the true meaning of brotherhood. The teacher must choose which impression to leave on the mind and tell the story for that.

B. Notes

Chapter xli. 8. *magicians*: these were the "learned" class.

Verse 34. *take up the fifth part*: i.e. of the corn produced.

Verse 38. *the Spirit of God*. In the O.T. the Spirit is the source of all extraordinary gifts. Cf. Exod. 31³; Judges 3¹⁰, 14⁶; Isa. 11².

Verses 41, 42. *signet ring*: the sign of his post as grand vizier.

Verses 41, 54. *all lands*. Famine in other countries caused by lack of rain. This common in Canaan. Cf. Gen. 12¹⁰.

Chapter xlvi. 6. *bowed down*: a fulfilment of Joseph's dreams.

Verse 9. *nakedness of the land*. Egypt was unprotected on the eastern border, and exposed to attacks from the quarter from which the brothers had come.

Verse 24. *Simeon*: he was the oldest except Reuben, who had saved Joseph's life.

Verse 25. *money*: not coin, but bars of silver.

Chapter xlvi. 11. *A present*. This was necessary when one appeared before any great person (1 Kings 10²⁵; Matt. 2¹¹).

Verse 32. Egyptians ate sitting on chairs and were served by servants from a sideboard. They did not eat with foreigners. (Glazebrook.)

Chapter xliv. 5. *divineth*. In the East a cup was used to find how events were to happen. It was sometimes inverted and the drops were watched to see how they came down the cup. (Glazebrook.)

Chapter xlv. 10. *Goshen*. Joseph was anxious that the family should settle in Goshen, because it was good land for pasturage and because it was nearest to Canaan. They might wish to leave Egypt, and Goshen was convenient.

Verse 24. *fall not out*. What Joseph had in mind was that they might quarrel as to who was most to blame about the past.

C. The Lesson

1. The point of departure after Lesson XI is obviously the fact that a very little incident may have great results. Joseph's kind action in helping the butler in prison led later to his summons before Pharaoh and all that came after that.

2. *How Joseph rose to Power*. Pharaoh's Dream. A natural one for a ruler of Egypt, where the failure of rain on the mountains to the south would cause a failure of the Nile to bring down the fertilizing mud. Lean ears of corn are the mark of famine in a waterless land. The butler's remembrance and Joseph's summons from prison. Joseph, because he lived with God, could see more clearly than others the workings of God in nature and in life. Hence his interpretation of the dreams. The result, Joseph's sudden elevation to

power and honour. This is common in the East (cf. the *Arabian Nights*). But notice these things: His early dream now completely fulfilled. Also, see how each step in his life had prepared him for this responsibility. The “pit,” the apprenticeship in Potiphar’s house, the prison, all had been necessary in the Providence of God.

3. *How Joseph used his Power.* Nobly, not for himself but for two great objects :

(1) *To Help Others.* His policy as ruler. Its foresight. Its triumphant success. How he was able to succour the needy ; this is the great opportunity of power (the royal motto “*Ich dien*,” *noblesse oblige*, the life of a man like Quarrier).

(2) *To Reconcile the Brothers.* One result of the famine was to bring his brothers down to Egypt for succour. They didn’t know him, but he knew them. What was he to do ? Why not declare himself at once ? The answer is, Because he wished to test them, to find out whether they were better men and had repented of their crime. Joseph did not nurse his wrongs or wish revenge. He wanted to make friends with his brothers. Hence the tests. *The First Visit.*—Joseph’s harshness—“spies”—the brothers in prison, their release on a condition. *The Second Visit.*—The entertainment, the cup in the sack, the arrest and accusation, Judah’s splendid plea, the reconciliation, Joseph’s generosity, the final settlement in Goshen under his protection.

4. This story lends itself ideally to dramatic reproduction by the pupils. The scenes stand out, the language is easily memorized.

XIII. THE PREPARATION OF MOSES

HOW GOD FITS HIS SERVANTS

EXODUS 1^{1-14, 22}, 2*A. For the Teacher*

1. *The New Era.* With the advent of Moses we enter upon an important period in the history of God's people. Moses did two great things : he created a nation out of a crowd of half-civilized people ; and he gave them a faith. His contribution to Israel's religion was the revelation of Jehovah as Israel's God and the ideal of a holy people, whose duty it was to carry out His purpose and reflect His character. No wonder he is regarded in the O.T. as one of the supreme personalities in this story.

2. The situation which is behind the advent of Moses must be clearly visualized. Egypt was exposed on her eastern frontier, just where the Hebrews lived, to sudden invasion, and this frontier was protected by a line of fortresses against the Bedawin. The slave and foreign population of Egypt was about one-third of the whole, and these strangers constituted a menace. Hence the policy of reducing their numbers by forced labour and massacre.

3. There is much in the story of Exodus which can hardly be taught to very young children owing to the harsh conception of God which is expressed in it. (See Redlich, pp. 168-171.) This can be easily explained to older children as part of the result of a progressive revelation. But for those of tender years the story of

Exodus should be given in a general summary. The present Lesson is, however, one exception.

B. Notes

Chapter i. 8. *a new king* : Rameses II, 1300–1234 B.C.

Verse 11. *Pharaoh* : “the Pharaoh.”

taskmasters : rather “gangmasters.”

treasure cities : rather “store cities” where large quantities of corn were laid up for the army.

Chapter ii. 3. *ark of bulrushes* : i.e. of papyrus, from which ancient paper was made. We read in Isaiah 18² of boats made of papyrus.

slime : i.e. asphalt imported from the Dead Sea to Egypt for embalming.

flags : i.e. reeds.

Verse 15. *Midian* : now known to be a district south of Edom and lying along the east of the Gulf of Akabah.

Verse 16. *draw water* : see note on Genesis 24¹¹, Lesson VII.

C. The Lesson

1. *Introduction.* It was 200 years after the Hebrews had settled in Goshen that Moses was born. There was a new Pharaoh of a new line of kings who had no favour for these strangers. This new king, indeed, began to oppress them. He had two reasons. One was that they were becoming so numerous that they might be a danger (see before). The forced labour to which he set them meant great destruction of life. The other reason was his need of a great deal of slave labour to build his great cities. Part of this work was brick-

making. Clay was dug out and softened with water and then sand was added to prevent the bricks cracking. Straw was used also, either to bind the material together or to prevent it sticking to the mould. Of course to compel the workers to find straw for themselves added enormously to their labour. When this forced labour failed to limit the numbers of the people the Pharaoh resorted to massacre.

2. Moses' Birth. Oppression, however, generally produces a deliverer (e.g. Gideon, David, Knox, Garibaldi). It was just when things were worst that Moses was born. The beautiful story of his birth shows the wonderful Providence of God. It reads like a miracle. But then, every baby's life is a miracle. The love, the care, the labour, the self-denial spent on the tender infant deserve his gratitude and love. Note the concern and the devotion of the mother and sister in this story.

3. Moses' Education. The education of the boy in the palace was part of his preparation for his future task. He was "instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." He was trained in mind and in body with the greatest care, and learned the art of leadership in the palace. We can see in his case the importance of all the training we get in knowledge, in good habits, in health. We can't have too much of it, and our fitness for our future work depends on the attention we give to all this; we get the reward later.

4. Moses' Choice. One thing more was needed for Moses' future career. He must choose his side. There were two sides. He could remain in the palace as a young prince, in comfort and ease and plenty. Or he could cast in his lot with his despised people, a mob of

slaves, down-trodden and oppressed. Which should he choose? Read Hebrews 11²⁴⁻²⁶. In his choice we see the influence of his mother's teaching, from which he had learned about the true God and His great promises to His people. Also we see Moses' noble nature. The incident of the slaying of the Egyptian was just the spark that set fire to his deliberate decision. A striking parallel to Moses' experience was that of Sir William Wallace, who killed an English officer for insulting Wallace's country. Wallace had to flee to the hills, and the persecutions he endured led to his heroic struggle which gave freedom to his country. The story of William Tell may also be used here, or that of Garibaldi.

5. *Moses' Retirement.* After his flight Moses was in Midian for a long time, when he had time to think and plan his future. He never forgot his people or his determination to help them. But this quiet time was needful for him to gather strength and confidence. (Cf. Paul and Jesus, and John Knox on the galleys in France, and many others.)

XIV. THE CALL OF MOSES

VOCATION

EXODUS 3 and 4

A. For the Teacher

1. Here is a type of lesson frequently repeated. Many of the notable leaders in Israel experienced such a "call" to their work, like Joshua (Josh. 1), Gideon (Judges 6), Samuel (1 Sam. 3), Isaiah (Isa. 6). The

present lesson may be taken as a guide to others of the same kind.

2. The dialogue between God and Moses is a vivid pictorial transcript of what went on in Moses' mind. It is important to avoid giving the impression that God spoke to Moses of old and does not speak to us. He speaks to us in the same way in nature and in opportunity and in our own thoughts. The *same things* are going on now as happened of old.

3. How the bush came to flame we are not told. Naturalists tell us that some of these desert shrubs produce a gas which now and again burns in a flame without hurting the shrub. Or was it the red sunset shining on the bushes, striking Moses' mind with the wonder of God's presence and speaking to him with the voice of nature? (*The Bible for Youth*, p. 105.)

4. The revelation of God's name here is important. The essential point is that now Jehovah was to be the nation's God and known as such by His name. It was Moses' great achievement to give the people a national faith. The meaning of the name is obscure. It ought to be spelled Jahweh, and the most probable meaning is "He will be." Instead of "I am that I am" of the A.V., the right phrase is "I will be what I will be." What God was to be would be shown in the history of the future. The ordinary form "Jehovah" may be kept and used, since it is consecrated by long custom.

5. *Spoiling the Egyptians* (3^{21, 22}; 12^{35, 36}). This is an example of the need of teaching children the truth of the Progressiveness of Revelation. God is represented as enjoining the Israelites to "borrow" all sorts

of treasure from the Egyptians. The moral sense was not developed. The people saw no harm in this "spoiling," and naturally the act is attributed to God's command. The simple explanation is that God could only teach right conduct by slow degrees. The narrator shares the imperfect moral sense of the "borrowers."

B. Notes

Chapter iii. 1. *mountain of God* : where God dwelt or was manifested.

Horeb : a mountain in the south of the range of Seir (Glazebrook).

Verse 2. *angel of the Lord*. Always God in one of His sense-manifestations.

Verse 5. *shoes* : sandals.

Verse 8. *land flowing with milk and honey*. The usual description of Palestine : "milk" because good pasture. The tribes mentioned are the original inhabitants of Palestine. The land, because of its broken character, was always inhabited by tribes.

Verse 15. *the LORD* : i.e. Jehovah, which is generally written "the LORD" in our version.

Verse 16. *elders of Israel*. Like other ancient Eastern communities, Israel was governed by a council of sheiks or elders who were the mightiest persons in the community.

C. The Lesson

1. *Introduction*. We have seen how Moses was made ready for his great work. But there was one more preparation needed. He must be sure he was "called

of God" to it. All the great leaders, like Joshua and David and Isaiah, had such a call. They needed assurance that God was behind them.

2. Picture of Moses in the desert with his sheep. His mind full of his people, so oppressed and miserable. How could they be helped? God had promised great things to the fathers;—how were they to be realized? Was *he* the destined instrument?

3. "The wonderful sight" that drew his attention in the midst of these thoughts, the Burning Bush (see under *A*). God was near him then, even in the desert! Moses *saw* God in the bush as we may see Him in the rainbow or the sunset or in the beauty of a glorious landscape or in a lovely flower. Jean François Millet, who painted the "Angelus," was trained by his father to see beauty everywhere. Once when they stood together before a beautiful sunset the father took off his hat reverently and said, "My son, it is God." That was a day of revelation to young Millet, and we see from his pictures, which are all of common things, that he never failed to see God in ordinary life.

4. The dialogue between God and Moses (see under *A*). It was clear now to Moses that he was to be God's instrument in delivering Israel out of Egypt. But like all men who have a difficult job to tackle he saw difficulties in the way that seemed insuperable. There were four. The first was his own unfitness. So Gideon felt, and Isaiah and Jeremiah. But this is met by the Divine assurance, "I will be with thee." The second difficulty was Moses' ignorance of God. How was he to tell the people he had been sent? This is met by the revelation of God's name, "I will be what I will be." The

third difficulty was the probable unbelief of Israel; they would not credit Moses' claim or trust him. This is met by the "signs" he was to show as credentials. The fourth difficulty was his slowness of speech. This is met by the promise of God's inspiration and the help of a good speaker in the person of Aaron. All the difficulties were thus cleared away, as they generally are when we are sure God is calling us to anything. And so gradually there came to Moses the firm conviction that God was calling *him* to this dangerous and glorious task. And this conviction was a very great strength to him thereafter. He knew God now, and he knew God was with him, and he saw his duty as co-operation with God.

5. Parallels in the Bible and outside: Abraham, Samuel, Jesus, Joan of Arc, Luther, Florence Nightingale.

6. Can we say the same about our work, e.g. the work of an engineer, ploughman, carpenter? Certainly. God's call comes in our inclinations, our circumstances, our fitness. And we ought all to feel that He is *calling* us to be a joiner or a teacher or a doctor, or to whatever other work in life we do, and that therefore He will be with us in our work.

XV. THE PLAGUES

RESISTING GOD

EXODUS 7-11

A. For the Teacher

1. *The Plagues.* The miraculous element in these events lies not in themselves. They are all quite

natural events which happened frequently in Egypt (see the Notes). It lies in their providential happening. Many other "miracles" in the O.T. (such as the crossing of the Red Sea) are to be explained in the same way. The miracle lies not in the events but in their coming when they did and as they did. In 10¹³ it is said the east wind brought the locusts, and that God sent the east wind. How much, then, here is history? In regard to that it must be remembered that four centuries at least lie between the events and the earliest of the sources of our narrative, and there have therefore probably been accretions to the facts like the heightening of the miraculous element. But the persistence of the traditions and their place in literature show that the essential facts, such as the actual situation in Egypt and the characters and conduct of the two chief figures, are reliable.

2. *The Hardening of Pharaoh.* The real interest of the narrative is not the plagues, but the actions and experience of Pharaoh. The plagues are only the dramatic stage on which is set the tragedy of a conscience. There is a real moral problem for the child in the actions attributed to God. God hardens a man's heart and then punishes him for being hardened! Now, in explaining this, we must make it clear that the Hebrews attributed everything, good and evil, to the direct action of God. If anyone died suddenly, God struck him dead (cf. Uzzah). If there was a pestilence, God sent it. They had not learned, as we have, to trace things to secondary causes. We trace the pestilence to its immediate cause, and set our sanitation right. Not so the Hebrews. This is the explanation of the representation here as to God hardening Pharaoh,

and of much else in the O.T. that puzzles children. In attributing the hardening to God the writer was wrong, and wrong because people had not yet learned the highest truth about God (again we see the necessity of teaching the progressiveness of revelation). Why do we say so? Because Christ has taught us the full truth about God. The teacher must set this story in the light of N.T. teaching, and not allow children to have the impression of God as a terrible, cruel and arbitrary Being. But, at the same time, it is easy to show what really happened. When a man resists the truth or duty often enough he becomes hardened against it. To resist God is to have the best in us destroyed. To silence the voice of conscience is by and by not to hear it at all. And this is the real meaning of the story, and the truth to be taught.

B. Notes

Chapter vii. 17. The first plague. "Each year the water of the river becomes like blood at the time of the inundation" (Sayce) and the water is rendered unhealthy by the substance in it.

Chapter viii. 2. The second plague: *Frogs*. The inundation, before referred to, brings myriads of frogs, amounting sometimes to a real plague.

Verse 16. The third plague: *Lice*; rather gnats or mosquitoes which arise from their breeding-grounds in stagnant waters.

Verse 21. The fourth plague: *Flies*. "The south wind constantly brings flies in swarms, and their germ-carrying habits make them a peril as well as an annoyance" (Peake).

Chapter ix. 3. The fifth plague: *Murrain*. This might have been caused by flies. A very severe cattle plague in Egypt was traced to the Nile.

Verse 9. The sixth plague: *Boils*. The Nile scab, “an irritating eruption . . . which is frequent in Egypt at about the time when the Nile begins to rise in June, and remains for some weeks upon those whom it attacks” (Driver). Skin diseases are frequent in Egypt.

Verse 18. The seventh plague: *Hail*. In verse 23 the “fire” is lightning.

Verse 32. “*rie*” is spelt, a coarse grain out of which bread was made.

Chapter x. 4. The eighth plague: *Locusts*. Not usual in Egypt, but reported several times by travellers, due to weather conditions. They were brought by the east wind. The best description of the locust plague is in *Joel 2*.

Verse 21. The ninth plague: *Darkness*; due to a sand storm “which brings a blackness worse than fog in a city and makes the air so hot that men can hardly breathe” (*The Bible for Youth*, p. 17) Often known in Egypt.

C. The Lesson

1. This lesson should be introduced by a vivid description of the dramatic situation. Moses (leader of a mob of slaves) appearing before Pharaoh (ruler of one of the greatest empires of the time). Parallels are easily found in Knox before Mary, and Luther before the Diet of Worms. “Here stand I. I cannot otherwise. So help me, God.”

2. The main story arranges itself in a series of pictures

quite naturally. The visits of Moses to the court, the description of the accompanying plagues, and how one springs naturally from the preceding. These plagues were natural events, but with God behind them as He is behind all providential events. The impressions made on Pharaoh, his gradual weakening and final surrender.

3. But the story must be so told as to bring out that the real drama was that which went on in Pharaoh's soul. Notice the four times he felt the impact of God's agency : (1) after the fourth plague (8²⁵) ; (2) after the seventh (9²⁷) ; (3) after the eighth (10^{10, 11}) ; and (4) after the ninth (10²⁴). Here we see a man struggling against God and God's will, and "hardening" himself against the truth. The result of this was that he became more and more insensible to it. The real tragedy in any life (and this can be taught in a very simple way) is when you feel "I ought" and yet refuse to obey. If that is repeated often it means moral ruin. It means that by and by conscience and God cease to be heard, and that is the worst that can happen to anyone. All this happens according to God's law that what a man sows he shall reap ; and it is just. The obvious lesson is to "follow right in the scorn of consequence."

XVI. THE PASSOVER

DELIVERANCE

EXODUS 12 and 13

A. For the Teacher

1. There are three points of special interest in the account of the Passover : the sacrifice of the lamb, the

sprinkling of the door-posts with blood, and the seven days' feast of unleavened bread. Scholars tell us that these all represent primitive customs. A spring festival was held among many tribes to seek Divine protection for the year's produce. At the festival pastoral tribes offered the firstlings of their flocks, agricultural people the produce of the soil, meal or parched corn. Associated with this is the rite of eating parched corn or unleavened cakes. The third rite, sprinkling of blood, was an ancient custom celebrated, e.g., on going to a new house, to prevent misfortune or disease coming to the people of the house. The Mexicans in the fifteenth century smeared leaves with their own blood and hung them up on their door-posts to propitiate their deity. "Such parallels are a great help to us; for they show that the idea of God seeking to slay and being propitiated with blood, is not part of the teaching of Moses, but a survival of primitive superstition, which he could not altogether do away" (Glazebrook). The Passover, then, was an old custom, only now it began to be kept with a new meaning.

2. *The Death of the First-born.* It is to be remembered (Lesson XV) that the events here narrated are separated from the earliest narrative of them by hundreds of years. This is one of the details which have probably been magnified by tradition. The last plague was a pestilence which carried off many young people, and this was regarded as a Divine punishment. The influenza epidemic in 1918 in Egypt carried away "a large proportion of young people" (Redlich). "The number of eldest sons appearing in *The Times* obituaries of officers in 1914-1915 was such as to suggest to some minds the idea of an evil fate" (Peake).

B. Notes

Chapter xii. 2. *the beginning of months.* Abib, which corresponds to part of our March–April, is to be the first month. “The critical months in autumn and spring, which closed and began the harvest, were natural starting points for the year among an agricultural people” (Peake).

Verse 8. *bread*: i.e. cakes. These were a flat kind of biscuit quickly baked, and still eaten by Bedawin. “Modern Jews make them a foot across and half an inch thick. The bitter herbs served as a salad.” (Peake.)

Verse 9. *sodden*: Old English for “boiled” (Glazebrook).

Verse 15. *the feast of unleavened bread.* Leaven was excluded as a corruption and a symbol of evil. Hence the demand for its removal. Paul (1 Cor. 5⁶⁻⁸, Gal. 5^{7, 9}) and our Lord (Mark 8¹⁵) make leaven symbolic of evil.

Verse 22. *hyssop*: a wall or rock plant (marjoram ?) with leaves like a brush, useful for sprinkling.

Verse 23. *when he seeth*: apparently, according to this particular source used in the story, the Israelites lived amongst the Egyptians, and not, as another source says, by themselves in Goshen.

Verse 37. The numbers are quite impossible and indicate an enlargement by tradition.

Chapter xiii. 9. *a sign . . . a memorial*: meaning uncertain. Later the Jews took the words literally. Hence what are called “phylacteries” (Matt. 23⁵), which were scrolls (containing passages from the Law) bound on the head.

C. The Lesson

1. Introduction. The last of the plagues a great pestilence which carried off many of the youth of Egypt. This came to be regarded as a punishment from God and was perhaps so represented at the time. At any rate it forced the hand of Pharaoh and compelled him to let Israel go. But before they went they celebrated, by God's command, a festival which was an old custom, but now took on a new meaning because of the deliverance from Egypt, with which it was henceforth always associated.

2. The Ceremonies. The killing of the lamb—a lamb without blemish of the first year—the sprinkling of the door-posts and lintel with a bunch of hyssop—the eating of the unleavened cakes with bitter herbs and with robes gathered up to the waist to leave the legs free, while they grasped their staff in their hands. It is a picture of men standing ready for a hasty journey.

3. The Meaning. Each part of the ceremonies had a meaning. The lamb and the sprinkling of the blood were sacrifice to God for the people's protection. The unleavened cakes indicated the haste of the escape ; they had no time to leaven them. The bitter herbs were to keep them in memory of the misery of Egypt. The staff was the symbol of the journey they were beginning.

4. Deliverance. The whole significance of the Passover and its ceremonies can be summed up in one word—Deliverance. That was the meaning it bore all through the Jews' history. The Feast was a celebration of the grace of God, and as the people came to know more of Him in their own history the Feast came to mean more and more to them. The truth in it for us is that the same God is the Redeemer and will always

save His children from all misery and bondage when they cry to Him. Illustrate by the two minutes' silence kept as a memorial of the deliverance bought for us by the sacrifices of the Great War.

5. *The Passover and the Lord's Supper.* This is also the meaning of the connection between the Passover and the Lord's Supper. God has redeemed men in Christ from the bondage and misery of sin. This is what is assured to us in the Holy Supper, which is the Christian Passover. "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us, therefore let us keep the feast ; not with old leaven . . . but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. 5^{7,8}).

XVII. THE CROSSING OF THE RED SEA MAN'S EXTREMITY GOD'S OPPORTUNITY

EXODUS 13¹⁷–15²¹

Date 1280 B.C.

A. For the Teacher

1. *The Importance of the Event.* In some ways the most important in the history of Israel. "It was then that Israel had had her first great historical experience of redemption ; indeed, it was, at least in part, her escape from Egypt that made her later national career possible ; and that redemption is concentrated, as it were, in the crossing of the Red Sea" (McFadyen).

2. *Its Historical Certainty.* "The event may be taken as one of the most surely attested . . . in Hebrew history." This is the verdict of scholarship : the

“ancient and incontrovertible evidence of Miriam’s Song, 15²¹, is sufficient.” (McFadyen.)

3. *The Miracle.* As in other cases, the miracle lay in the providential happening of a perfectly natural event. The route of the fleeing Israelites led them across an arm of the Red Sea which was quite narrow. The sea extended in ancient times farther north than it does to-day. Just north of where the sea ends now there is a sandy valley which even to-day is sometimes at high tide flooded. In earlier times it was probably an extension of the sea. What happened was that a strong wind drove back the water at low tide and laid the passage bare. When the Egyptians followed, the tide had risen and the wind fallen and they were engulfed in the waters. So far from this being a unique event there are several parallels. Almost exactly the same thing occurred at the siege of Leyden in 1574, as Motley relates at length (*History of the Dutch Republic*, part iv, chap. 2). “For an example of an army overwhelmed by the returning tide we need not look further than the history of our own King John” (Glazebrook). A similar incident is recorded in an account of the Crimean War at the Sea of Azov. In the present case the “miracle” is the sending of the wind at the hour of need.

4. In connection with this lesson get the children to learn Psalm 77¹⁸⁻²⁰ or the glorious song Exod. 15.

B. Notes

Chapter xiii. 18. *Red Sea* : really Reedy Sea. At Lake Timsah, to which the sea then extended, grow reeds which are not now found in the Red Sea.

Verse 21. *The Cloud and Fire*: both are symbols of the Divine presence often found in the O.T. Cloud: Exod. 19^{9, 16}, 33⁷⁻¹¹, 34⁵; Num. 12^{5, 8}; Deut. 31¹⁵. Fire: Gen. 15¹⁷; Exod. 24¹⁷; Psalm 18⁸⁻¹³. (Glazebrook.)

Chapter xiv. 21. *east wind*. This would drive the waters northwards while the ebb would carry them south, leaving a dry space.

Chapter xv. 1, ff. *The Song of Moses*. It is probably of David's time or post-exilic. It implies settlement in Canaan (¹³) and the building of the Temple (¹⁷). The analysis of its structure is simple. It is a magnificent poem.

Verse 15. *dukes*: leaders or sheiks of the clan.

Verse 17. *mountain*: hill country of Palestine.

Verse 20. *timbrel*. The tambourine was much used by the ancients in connection with the dance (Glazebrook).

C. The Lesson

1. This lesson attaches itself, of course, to the preceding events. The people were thrust out because of these events. Their route was south from Rameses, Etham, Succoth and Migdol, where they crossed the Sea. God led them, not by the short northern coast route, but "about by the way of the wilderness" (13¹⁷⁻¹⁸). The one sufficient reason for this was that they were only a mob of slaves, and before they could take possession of Canaan they needed a long discipline to make them a strong organized force.

2. The "steps" of this story are clear: (1) The hasty departure. (2) The Egyptian pursuit. They

realized that they had lost a treasure of unpaid service. (3) The peril of the Israelites between the enemy and the sea. Their bitter reproaches of Moses. Moses' grand calmness and courage: "Stand firm and you will see how God will deliver you." (McFadyen's chapter on this is good.) (4) The crossing. (5) The Egyptians' débâcle. (6) Israel's twofold deliverance from the sea and the enemy. (7) The Song. Try to visualize the whole scene, the panic and horror of the people in their plight, the menace of the Egyptian chariots, the calm figure of the great leader, God's intervention.

3. The outstanding truth here is the Sovereignty of God. Man's extremity. His helplessness. His utter dependence on God. His one duty is to go forward to the task or responsibility before him in the confidence that God will see him through. This is the source of calmness and courage like those of Moses. Illustrate by the *Great War*, the *Spanish Armada*, Motley's story of the Dutch Republic. The central incident here has countless parallels in the lives of well-known men.

XVIII. MANNA AND QUAILS

GOD'S PROVISION

EXODUS 15²²⁻²⁷, 16

A. For the Teacher

1. *The Route.* The differences of opinion as to the actual route taken by Israel in the wilderness show how uncertain the locality of the places named is. Glazebrook thinks the Israelites struck right across the

desert of Paran. He puts Marah in that desert and Elim at the head of the Gulf of Akabah. On the whole the traditional route is more likely. It is down the east side of the Gulf of Suez, and Marah and Elim must be placed there. Sinai is then one of the peaks in the southern parts of the peninsula. Redlich thinks we should not attempt to use a map at all for teaching these events. The country into which Moses led the people was one familiar to him in his previous experience. It was full of danger and hardship for the people, danger from the wandering tribes (see Exod. 17), and hardship from the sterile nature of the land.

2. *The Miracle.* We have here, as previously and subsequently, a "natural phenomenon with a religious interpretation." Manna is a well-known product of that region. A species of tamarisk exudes a sweet juice from its trunk at night, in summer. This falls to the ground in the form of small pellets like corn. It is soon melted by the sun's rays, but it can be boiled and strained so as to provide palatable food as sweet as honey. It is known to Arabs to-day and called by the same name. Quails are a species of birds which fly over this wilderness in their annual emigrations in great numbers. They fly with the wind and alight at night, covering the ground and quite exhausted. They are therefore easily captured. The coming of the manna and the quails are therefore natural events. The wonder lies in the quantity of both and the supply regularly provided at the word of Moses. The story would, however, be told often and the details heightened in the telling. The main point, however, is this: is not the narrative right in saying simply that God sent this provision? A religious view of life, which asks God

to "give us our daily bread," need have no hesitation about the answer.

3. The teacher should read in connection with this lesson Numbers 11⁴⁻²³ and 31⁻³⁵, the earlier narrative of the same events, where the quails are sent, not simultaneously with the manna, but some time after it and because the people were tired of the manna. Servants in Scotland used to stipulate that they would only get salmon once a day !

B. Notes

Chapter xv. 22. *Shur* : this means "wall." The "wall of Egypt" was a line of fortifications which marked the eastern boundary of Egypt and protected it from the incursions of nomad tribes (Glazebrook).

Verse 23. *Marah* : bitter. In the desert water is often unpleasant to drink because of its bitter taste.

Chapter xvi. 1. *wilderness of Sin*. Probably lying along the eastern boundary of the Gulf of Suez, to the west of Sinai.

Verse 4. *bread from heaven* : i.e. from the skies.

Verse 7. *see the glory*. God's power will be apparent in the provision of the manna.

Verse 10. *glory of Jehovah* : a brilliant glow of fire gleaming through the cloud, revealing God's presence.

Verse 15. *manna* : R.V. "What is it ?" This is a popular account of the meaning of the word which is obscure.

Verse 16. *omer* : originally a cup or bowl, but used by the Hebrews as a measure. It is about 6½ pints.

Verse 17. *some more, some less* : according to the size of the family.

Verse 19. In the East bread is baked every day fresh ; yesterday's bread is not eaten (Driver).

Verse 23. *seethe* : i.e. boil.

Verse 31. *coriander seed* : a wild plant of Egypt and Palestine with small greyish seeds the size of a peppercorn. The seeds are used as spice and have a pleasant flavour (Driver).

wafers : pastry made with oil and honey (Driver).

C. The Lesson

1. A Russian poet describes how once all the virtues were invited to a banquet in heaven. They behaved very nicely and were kind to one another. Two, however, were strangers to each other, Benevolence and Gratitude.

“They stared when they were introduced,
On earth they never once had met.”

That is an exaggeration, but the conduct of the Israelites shows how much truth there is in it. They had just experienced a great deliverance, but they soon forgot that and began to complain of their hardships. They did not yet understand or believe that God was with them.

2. *God's Wonderful Patience and Goodness.* The water sweetened for them, and manna and quails sent. What the manna and the quails were, and how they came. Was God behind their coming ? Yes, as He is behind all our provision. Jesus teaches us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” and thus tells us to realize how constantly we depend on a Heavenly Father's goodness. The bread we eat comes from the

baker and the miller and the farmer. But it comes from God before any of them touch it. He ripens the harvest and sends the rain and sunshine. God is in all our life, the great Giver. However our blessings come to us, from parents or friends, they all come out of His hand. Sir Walter Scott wrote to a young man, "The older you grow the more you will be thankful that the finest of God's mercies are common mercies."

"Back of the loaf is the snowy flour,
And back of the flour is the mill,
And back of the mill is the wheat, and the shower,
And the sun, and the Father's will."

—M. D. BABCOCK.

3. And therefore it is only the truth that God is everywhere and in everything. Lots of people do not see this, and because they are blind they forget the hand that feeds and sustains them. Ingratitude is one of the worst of all sins, whether it be forgetfulness of earthly benefactors or of the Heavenly Benefactor. When Jesus healed the ten lepers, only one came back to thank Him. One out of ten ! Let us not forget those to whom we owe much—parents, teachers, friends, helpers. Above all let us not forget Him to whom we owe *all*. Robert Burns wrote of one of *his* benefactors :

"The bridegroom may forget the bride
Was made his wedded wife yest'ren ;
The monarch may forget the crown
That on his head one hour has been ;
The mother may forget the child
That smiles sae sweetly on her knee ;
But I'll remember thee, Glencairn,
And a' that thou hast done for me."

And we, who are children of God's love, should not be less grateful to Him.

XIX. ISRAEL AT SINAI

ANOTHER NEW THOUGHT OF GOD

EXODUS 19, 20 and 24

A. For the Teacher

1. "Among all the scenes described in history or poetry, there is none more impressive than that of Sinai and the Giving of the Law. A whole people encamped upon the plain at the foot of a cloud-capped mountain, while their representative stands on the mountain-side to receive the revelation of the Deity who dwells amid the clouds. The lightning flashes all round, and a voice like a trumpet proclaims the new law which is to be the foundation of a great religion. We know that this wonderful narrative is not history but poetry. But it is poetry which makes a worthy setting for inestimable jewels of truth" (Glazebrook, vol. i, p. 289).

2. What is "history" here? A great religious event, one of the greatest in the story of Israel, an event which was a step upward in the knowledge of God and of duty. (1) There was given a revelation of God which was new. Israel knew Jehovah at the Exodus as Deliverer. Now she learned that He was righteous and that He had a purpose to work out in her life. This meant a lofty thought of God, the Holy One, and of her own great destiny. (2) There was given also a revelation of duty. Religion and morality were now bound indissolubly together as they were always afterwards in Israel. God would protect His people, but every promise of His was conditioned by their obedience. This is history.

3. The thought that summarizes all this is the thought that is dominant all over this narrative, that of a Covenant or Agreement between God and Israel. This was always the conception of religion in Israel. It was based on the old practice of two persons partaking of each other's blood to bind them to an agreement (this explains Exod. 24⁵⁻⁸). It is a dangerous idea, because it is apt to lead people to imagine that God is their Ally right or wrong. A "covenant-keeping God" is a phrase liable to misuse. But it *enshrines* a great truth, that religion has two sides. God can only do good to those who are one with His will.

4. *What is Poetry in this Narrative?* All its splendid symbolism, the cloud, the fire, the storm, God writing with His "finger," the voice of the trumpet. As Dr. Sanday puts it, "the literal truth was that God spoke to the heart of Moses ; the poetic truth was that He spoke in thunder and lightning from the crest of Sinai" (quoted by Redlich).

5. Some O.T. scholars have suggested that the Decalogue in its complete form was much later than Moses. I cannot see any convincing reason for believing this. There is not a single idea in the Decalogue that could not belong to the time of Moses. No doubt the Commandments are mainly negative in form. But each one points to a positive principle of conduct. And Israel had to be warned against many things which they saw commonly practised around them. Hence "thou shalt not." The commandments are like a shelving beach that keeps out the destructive ocean. They are not final. Jesus showed this by His higher teaching. But they were a great step in the way forward.

6. The conception of God at this stage is still very imperfect. The idea that God punishes children for their parents' sins roused a protest later in Israel (Ezek. 18). We no longer believe that God punishes one for another's sins, though by heredity and owing to human solidarity one may suffer the results of another's sin. We are *punished* only for our own sin.

B. Notes

Chapter xix. 1. *wilderness of Sinai*. The most likely situation of Sinai is in the southern part of the peninsula, in accord with the traditional view. The peak usually meant satisfies the conditions of the narrative. It is high, difficult of access and the scene of severe storms.

Chapter xx. 3. *before*, rather "beside," exclusive worship.

Verse 8. *holy* means "consecrated," set apart.

Verse 16. In a court of law.

C. The Lesson

1. *Introduction*. Every child realizes the importance of a new step in learning something. The day we begin Latin or French, or, still better, when we learn something great about a father's or mother's character or love. So Israel here. A great new lesson about God and about duty.

2. *The Scene*. Sinai—fitting stage for so great an event. The cloud and storm, the great, high, far-off summit.

3. All the preparations made show how great and solemn the occasion was: the washing of clothes, the

fencing off of the mountain, the messages Moses got for the people to prepare their minds.

4. A great new truth about *God* was given—the truth that He chooses men to do great things, and helps them in the doing. He chose Israel and promised them His blessing ; and that is why Israel had so great a history. And all along, this was the thing that made her endure and be patient and struggle on, the thought that God had chosen her for great things. Every one of us ought to learn the same about our own life.

5. But there was also a great new truth about *duty* given to Moses. If God is to bless us we must let Him do it. We must do what He says. We must obey His Law. Nothing can take the place of this. Worship, faith, church-going—none of these things will please God if we fail to do His will, i.e. if we fail to be honest and truthful and faithful in our duty. God will accept nothing from us instead of that. We must strive to *be like Him* as well as to believe in Him.

6. No doubt there was much Israel was yet to learn about God. Her ideas were still imperfect. But this one thing she did learn through Moses, that God is a holy God and seeks holiness in His children.

XX. THE GOLDEN CALF

IDOLATRY

EXODUS 32

A. For the Teacher

1. From the *historical* point of view, i.e. for the understanding of the story of Israel which we are read-

ing, the chief interest of this narrative is the light it casts on the religious condition of Israel at this period. (1) Their inability to realize the presence of an unseen God with them. They had to get at something visible to represent Him. We cannot condemn them too severely since most people to-day are in the same condition. We also put all sorts of things in place of God, churchgoing, sacraments, creeds, forms, and are satisfied to rise no higher. (2) The influence on Israel of the customs of Egypt. Some scholars say the golden calf was not the result of Egyptian influence. But this seems a mistake. The people could not have lived hundreds of years in Egypt without many traces of this contact, and in Egypt Apis was represented by a bull.

2. The very severity of the punishment meted out to the people shows the place idolatry had in their life all through the history. It was *the sin* against which the prophets waged war continually. In Palestine the presence of Canaanites living in the midst of Israel with their sensuous nature-worship was a constant temptation. Here so early was the national sin already rampant.

3. From the *religious* point of view, the interest of the narrative is the relation of religious faith to externals. This story gives a good opportunity for a simple explanation of the meaning of the Christian Sacraments (see below).

B. Notes

Verse 4. *calf*: rather "bull."

molten. Probably the core of the image was of wood. It was overlaid with gold. Hence it could be ground to powder.

Verse 5. The calf only *represented* Jehovah, since it is regarded as having led the people from Egypt.

Verse 6. *eat and drink* : i.e. in the sacrifice. In ancient times a sacrifice was a meal shared with the god by his worshippers.

play, i.e. music and dancing.

Verses 11, ff. Note the *four* motives urged on God for mercy.

Verse 14. *repent*. God is often represented as repenting that He had done this or that. This means not that He had changed His purpose but that He had changed His action in response to a change of conduct in man. It is a "human" way of speaking of God. Moses interceded for the people and God was merciful in response to his prayer.

Verse 19. Dancing was always a religious ceremony in ancient times. Cf. David dancing before the Ark. "In the East dancing was, and is, the language of religion."

Verse 25. *for a derision*. The enemies would sneer at the people, who had boasted of God's leadership, deserting Him thus.

Verse 30. *make atonement* : i.e. by intercession.

Verse 31. *returned* : to the mountain.

Verse 32. *book* : the roll of God's people in Israel. The image is borrowed from the custom of keeping registers of citizens. It is not "the book of life" of the N.T. This is a noble passage in Moses' life. Cf. Paul's similar prayer (Rom. 9³).

C. The Lesson

1. *Introduction*. The great truth of God's presence with us always which Jesus has declared to us. Can

we believe it ? Israel could not, at least without Moses to help them. And therefore they put something in place of God which they could really see. How did this happen ?

2. *The Story.* These are the steps or mental pictures.

- (1) The long delay—Where was Moses ?—Give us a leader we can *see* ! Aaron's weak compliance. The great festival and sacrifice with feasting and dancing.
- (2) The wrath of God—He will destroy the people, but is diverted from this by Moses' prayer. (3) Moses' return to camp. His savage punishment of the offenders.
- (4) Moses and Aaron, Aaron's weak excuses. (5) The fury of the Levites and their fierce judgment on the people. (6) Moses' splendid intercession, so Christlike in its spirit and a noble close to this distressing episode.

3. *The Meaning of the Incident.*

- (1) It means that one of the sins we most easily fall into is to put something in place of God. This is one of the greatest of all temptations, e.g. money, success, fame, position, clothes, games. God must come first in our hearts. That is the meaning of religion.

- (2) We, like Israel, find it difficult to be sure that God is with us. And because God knows this, He has given us something to remind us of Him and to lead our thoughts to Him. The Church and the Bible and the Sacraments are for this purpose. Baptism reminds us that God is our Father and loves us. The Lord's Supper reminds us that Christ is always with us to help us. But however sacred these things are they must never make us forget that it is God Himself we are to trust and love and live with by prayer and service every day

XXI. WANDERINGS

DISCIPLINE

NUMBERS 10²⁹—14, 16, 20 and 21

A. For the Teacher

1. *The Route.* This lesson deals with the “wanderings” of Israel in the “wilderness” and some of the incidents of these years. The locality of many of the places named is quite uncertain. But, assuming (with most scholars) that Sinai is in the south of the peninsula, we can trace the general lines of the journey clearly enough. The peninsula is bounded on the north by the wilderness of Zin, on the east by the wilderness of Sin, on the west by the wilderness of Shur (along the Gulf of Suez), and on the south by Horeb and Sinai. Kadesh (the second headquarters of the people) is either in the centre of the wilderness of Paran (which occupies the centre of the peninsula) or at the eastern edge of it, and Mount Hor to the east of it in the Seir range. These are the fixed points. A general description is all that is necessary.

2. *Two Problems.* Some of the incidents in this lesson raise questions about two matters: the miracles of judgment recorded, and (in connection with them) the character of God as displayed in them. Here the results of the criticism of the O.T. help us. The main results of that criticism are two: (1) that the narratives date from some hundreds of years after the events, and (2) that the first six books of the Bible are a single historical work compiled out of several sources (of very different dates) and combined by an editor. It is clear

then that events such as those narrated here may have been heightened and coloured in course of time with telling and re-telling, and also that deaths which may have occurred in connection with revolts against Moses' authority would (by Hebrew custom) be attributed to a Divine Judgment. We may believe in the events without being committed to the ancient interpretation of them. And we must beware of teaching a story like this so as to give a false impression of God as a vengeful or arbitrary deity or so as to suggest that natural calamities are always a Divine judgment.

3. *The Main Point.* We have in these chapters a vivid picture of the difficulties of a great enterprise and the troubles and worries of leadership. What we should aim at is to make clear the meaning and purpose of the long delay in reaching Canaan and of the difficulties that met Israel on the way. That is brought out in the lesson.

B. Notes

Chapter x. 30. *mine own land.* Israel was going north and Midian lay to the east.

Verse 31. *instead of eyes.* A native of the desert would discover wells and oases where others would miss them.

Verse 33. *the ark.* The ark was a box of acacia wood which was the symbol of Jehovah's presence.

Chapter xi. 1. *fire of the LORD : lightning ?*

Verse 4. *mixed multitude.* The host included various elements (Arab and Egyptian) that had escaped with the Israelites.

Verse 5. *leeks, etc.* All southern nations find these an acceptable garnishing to food.

Chapter xii. 1. *Cushite woman* : “Cushite” may be “Ethiopian” or from a Cush in Arabia. If it is Zipporah, it is difficult to see how she could be called an Ethiopian.

Verse 3. *meek*. The word refers to a humble attitude towards God, not towards man.

Verse 4. *tabernacle of congregation* : rather “tent of meeting,” the tent where Moses met with God.

Chapter xiii. 17. *southwards* : “by the South.” South with a capital always means the Negeb, the region between Canaan and the southern desert.

the mountain : i.e. the hill country of Judah.

Verse 29. *Amalekites* : a roving tribe that ranged over the whole southern wilderness.

Jebusites : a tribe occupying Jebus, i.e. Jerusalem.

Amorites : a tribe dwelling in the hill country of Palestine.

Hittites : a non-Semitic tribe dwelling to the north of Palestine. Elements of it may have lived in the country.

Canaanites : those inhabiting the low-lying parts of Palestine.

Chapter xiii. 32. *that eateth up*, etc. : i.e. by producing less than the inhabitants need for support.

Chapter xiv. 40. *up to the top of the mountain* : i.e. into the hill country.

Chapter xvi. 6. *chersubs* or firepans.

Verse 14. *put out the eyes* : i.e. will you throw dust in their eyes ?

Verse 30. *the pit*, rather Sheol, the name of the unseen world of popular belief, situated in the centre of the earth.

Chapter xx. 14. The request to Edom was due to Israel's desire to attack Canaan from the east as they had already been defeated in the south (14⁴⁵).

Verse 17. *the king's highway* : i.e. the regular caravan route.

Chapter xxi. 4. *discouraged* : because there were 150 miles extra of desert to traverse.

Verse 24. Note that Israel is being fitted for conquest. There are unity and organization now.

C. The Lesson

1. *The Road to Pisgah.* North from Sinai to Kadesh, then to Mount Hor, then skirting Edom right up to the country of Moab by the Zered and the Arnon as far as Pisgah, the mountain range east of the Dead Sea.

2. *Episodes by the Way.* Note (1) the constant murmurings of the people, at the manna, at the want of water, at the length of the way, at the danger from enemies, at the account of Canaan and its people. (2) The jealousy of Moses shown by Miriam and Aaron, by Korah, by Dathan and Abiram. This resulted in many unhappy conflicts in which the rebels suffered, later ages thought by the judgment of God. But we must beware of thinking that all suffering is a judgment, and still more of thinking that God is unjust or revengeful. He is the Heavenly Father, but this would only be learned by degrees. (3) The real dangers to the people from the hostile peoples on the march (like Edom), from the serpents of the desert. (4) The strain on Moses of all this. The burden was heavy on him, and it is not wonderful that his temper sometimes gave

way. (5) The report of the spies which roused anxiety and fear in many.

3. *The Meaning of the Long Wilderness Journey.* We can see the purpose of God in leading the people such a long way round. When they set out from Egypt they were a mob, not fit to conquer Canaan. They were trained and disciplined by the very difficulties of the desert. The wilderness was their school, to strengthen them from a mob into a disciplined army.

4. This reveals one of the greatest truths of life, that we *need* difficulty and trial to make us men and women. The worst thing that could happen to any child is to have no difficulties. The greatest men have risen against the hardest conditions and been made by them. All complaints about difficulties are (like Israel's) foolish because these are God's way of making us strong. Quote from Browning's *Rabbi ben Ezra*, "Then welcome Earth's rebuff."

XXII. BALAAM

FACING DUTY

NUMBERS 22-24

A. For the Teacher

1. "The chapters which tell the story of Balaam are among the most striking and most beautiful in all the O.T. The personality of Balaam, the nature of his utterances, and the circumstances in which he appears, combine to inspire an extraordinary interest. And the manner in which the story is told is unsurpassed for dramatic power" (Glazebrook).

2. It should be noted that the centre of interest for the *narrator* lies in the beautiful oracles in which Balaam sees the future greatness of Israel already settled. The narrative is merely the setting for this wonderful prediction. The centre of interest for *us*, however, lies in the character and actions of Balaam himself. The story is taken as a whole here, and the general impression of the narrative as a whole is given in the lesson.

3. It is interesting to notice the superstitions prevalent at this period, and for some time afterwards. The narrative is full of them. Balak uses sacrifice in order to dispose God to be favourable to his desire. The power of words themselves magically to bring about a result is implicitly trusted. (Cf. the story of the theft of the blessing by Jacob.) One place is regarded as more favourable to petition than another. See how Balak shifted Balaam about when he was unsuccessful. Also, notice that inspiration and blessing can be bought, according to Balak's belief. Finally the power of speech in animals here is paralleled by the story in Genesis 2.

4. Here, as elsewhere, we can easily trace the two main sources out of which the Hexateuch (the first six books of the Bible) was compiled. And here, as elsewhere, this analysis by scholars is a help. It is a difficulty for the pupil, e.g., to understand why Jehovah (22²⁰) should first tell Balaam to go, and then (22) be angry with him for going. The two passages are, however, from two different sources, one of which represented Balaam as going with God's permission, the other as going without it. They are two different stories with different details.

B. Notes

Chapter xxii. 5. *Pethor* : *Pituru* on the Euphrates, a month's journey away.

Chapter xxiii. 1. Seven is a sacred number (Gen. 21²⁸ and Josh. 6⁴).

Verse 7. *parable* : rather, discourse.

Verses 7-10. Balaam's first oracle. These four poems are independent compositions belonging to the time of David or Solomon, Israel's Elizabethan age of prosperity. (Cf. 24⁷. Agag lived in the time of Saul.)

Verse 9. *shall not be*, etc. : i.e. is regarded as far above any of the nations owing to Jehovah's favour.

Verse 10. *let me die* : because the death of the righteous was long-deferred and peaceful.

Verse 21. *shout of a king* : i.e. in honour of a king, i.e. Jehovah (cf. 1 Sam. 4⁵).

Chapter xxiv. 7. Agag lived long after this period.

Verse 10. *smote* his hands, a sign of scorn (cf. Job 27²³).

Verse 17. *not now*. The prediction refers to the distant future.

star : the image for a king (Isa. 14¹², R.V. ; Rev. 22¹⁶).

C. The Lesson

1. *Introduction.* We are at a crisis in the fate of Israel. She has finished her wanderings, conquered the Amorites, been strengthened and disciplined into a strong host, and now stands at the gate of Canaan. We draw our breath as we watch the fortunes of the

people. Moab alone disputes her passage, for Moab is a pastoral people and fears the victory of Israel. Hence the efforts of her king to secure Divine aid against Israel.

2. *The Steps Balak Took.* Balaam, a noted seer, is sent for because Balak believes in the power of a seer's words to bless or curse—Balaam's desire to go and the struggle in his soul—consults God in order to feel encouraged to go—but determined to go all the same—meeting of Balak and Balaam—Balak does everything he can to help, sacrifices lavishly, goes from one spot that is unfavourable to another that may be better—nothing of any avail—Balaam can only speak what is given, however much he wishes to please Balak—Balaam tries hard to earn the large bribe offered—but in vain. In spite of himself he has to bless Israel—the beautiful poems he utters become more and more favourable to Israel, till in the last Moab's overthrow by Israel is forecasted. One of the sources of the narrative tells us that, foiled in this way, Balaam suggested to Balak a far better way of getting what he sought (Num. 31¹⁶ and references).

3. *A Picture of a Superstitious Age.* The two things of special importance to us are, Balak's effort to *buy* God's favour and Balaam's idea that he might persuade God to come on his side when he saw quite clearly that he ought not to go. It was this temptation and this delusion that led Balaam on.

This shows us where Balaam's error was. He knew the act was wrong yet he wanted to do it for his own advantage. He consulted God, but only to get God's approval. He went to Balak against his own con-

science. He tried to get God's sanction for what his conscience told him was wrong. If a man resolves to do a wrong thing and to gloss it over he can always do this. But it is the worst kind of sin. Cardinal Wolsey is an example of this, and his end is an instance of the reward this conduct usually gains. Macbeth is another instance (would not play false and yet would wrongly win). The lesson, of course, is to do the right always and in everything whatever the consequences, never to palter with truth or duty. Face the truth and the right and embrace it at once and without trying to get round it. Thus only can we preserve our honour and win God's approval.

XXIII. THE DEATH OF MOSES UNFINISHED WORK DEUTERONOMY 34

A. For the Teacher

1. The death of Moses marks the end of one era and the beginning of another. He is the second, and probably the very greatest, of the great personalities that God raised up to direct the course of the sacred history. He founded a nation, gave it its religion, shaped its fundamental religious ideas, and was the fountain-head of its laws. He is a notable example of the influence of great personalities on the destiny of mankind. This is a good opportunity for bringing this out.

2. Moses was excluded from the Promised Land. He was condemned to die at the very brink of success and remain outside. Why? What was the sin that

caused so tragic a fate ? Unbelief, according to Numbers 20¹². But there is no sign of unbelief in Numbers 20⁸⁻¹¹. And indeed sublime faith is one of Moses' notable qualities. Was one failure of faith sufficient to account for this terrible punishment ? This appeals to the mind of youth as unfair. Was it bad temper ? —but was indignation (very well justified) sufficient ground for his condemnation ? As a matter of fact we have here, as constantly elsewhere, to distinguish between fact and interpretation. The fact was that Moses died, at the end of the long journey. This had to be accounted for, and several explanations are given. But we have a sufficient reason in the history itself. Moses had done a great work. What remained to be done (the conquest of Canaan) needed a younger and more vigorous man. God buries His workers and carries on His work. The real Agent was God. Moses had done one part of God's commission ; Joshua was to do another.

3. The teacher may be confused between two truths which lie in this lesson. One is that sin (unbelief or another) may shut us out of blessing. The other is that all work and life are marked by imperfection. He will have to choose which he is to teach. It is the latter that is given here because it is the real lesson of Moses' situation on Mount Nebo.

B. Notes

Verse 1. *Pisgah.* “Pisgah is the name for the line of cliffs which form the western edge of the table-land of Moab, which is about 3,000 feet above sea level. . . . The top of Pisgah is a promontory

which runs out from this cliff, due east of the north end of the Dead Sea, and commands a view of almost all Southern Palestine" (Glazebrook). For this consult Smith's *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, which all teachers should possess, pp. 562, 653; also Henderson's *Palestine*, pp. 71, 72 and index.

over against: i.e. in front of, or east.

C. The Lesson

1. Moses on the spur of Pisgah looking out on the land he was never to visit! A dramatic and touching scene. What were his thoughts? Of pain at his own disappointment? Yes. But also of his unfinished work. He had brought the people so far, only to lay down his task uncompleted. What was the reason for this? Several are given in the narrative. It is in one place looked on as a punishment for some sin. But in others it is said to be *for the sake of the people* (Deut. 1³⁷, 3²⁶, 4²¹). And this is the best explanation. It was for their sake, because they needed another and younger man to lead them to battle and conquest.

2. But we must not forget what Moses had done and been. He was one of the greatest of all the great men God raised up. He showed a faith in God such as few have ever had. He was patient with the rebellious and discontented people. But there were even greater things. He founded the nation. Before his time they were a mob of slaves. Now they were an organized host, united, strong, warlike, and with a national feeling. Also, he founded the nation's religion. He showed them what God was like, how holy, how just; and how God had chosen them to be His people, and would

protect them and lead them, if they would do His will. He gave them their first laws, too, which were the foundation of their life. Thus, under God, this great man was the creator of Israel.

3. And yet, like every other human being, he had to leave his work incomplete. Tell the story of William the Silent and how he too perished on the borders of the promised land; that of Keats—or of R. L. Stevenson—or of Hallam (who inspired *In Memoriam*), or any other. Show also how many die in youth with the promise unfulfilled. And indeed how we all can only do a little and leave so much undone. This is true of knowledge and of action. What is the meaning of it?

4. One thing it means is that this life is only a little bit of the real life of any of us; and that we pursue our work in eternity. The other world is an interesting place because it is a place of *work*, of happy activity. This is the view of the future life to be given to children.

5. Also it means that we are meant to find our satisfaction here not in finishing things but in labouring at them. Read to the older pupils Browning's *Grammarians Funeral* or the closing paragraph of Stevenson's essay *El Dorado*: "To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive, and the true success is to labour." Good work is not to be judged by its completion, but by the qualities of conscience and industry and love we put into it.

XXIV. THE CALL OF JOSHUA

JOSHUA 1

This Lesson to be taught on the model of Lesson XIV.

XXV. JORDAN AND JERICHO

SURMOUNTING DIFFICULTIES

JOSHUA 3, 4 and 6

A. For the Teacher

1. We stand now at the start of a new era in Israel's history. It is clear from the whole tone of the narrative that the historian was very sensible of this. The time of preparation and waiting is over, and Israel, united and organized, is to address herself to the great task of the conquest of Canaan. Two great difficulties are before her. One is the nature of the country, full of hills and valleys and protected by the deep cleft of the Jordan. The other is the opposition of the native tribes. The two incidents before us illustrate these difficulties and the way in which they were overcome. That is why we take them together. If they are taught separately the teacher is referred for the first to the lesson on the crossing of the Red Sea (XVII).

2. *The Miracles.* The two incidents illustrate two kinds of narrative dealing with miracle which meet us often in the O.T. (1) The crossing of the Jordan, like the crossing of the Red Sea, is a natural event happening providentially. A landslide occurred which for a time dammed the waters until they broke through the obstacle. "Jehovah's care and love for His people was revealed by the opportune use of natural forces." In A.D. 1257 a landslip occurred in the Jordan Valley and did exactly what is reported here (see MacFadyen, p. 87, and Peake, p. 250). (2) The collapse of the walls of Jericho is another kind of event. Excavations

at Jericho have revealed the remains of walls so strong as to surprise modern architects. What, then, are we to say to the narrative? "Jericho," says Sir G. A. Smith, "is a city surrounded by resources. Yet in war she has easily been taken. That her walls fell down at the sound of Joshua's trumpets is no exaggeration, but the soberest summary of all her history." In other words, this is a poetical way of saying that Jericho, inhabited by an enervated people, gave way before the assault of faith and courage. The truth here is the help and power of God to which Israel owed victory. No walls, however strong, could stand against the will of God. Again we see that the essence of the story is true. The form of it is poetry but not exaggeration.

3. *The Massacres at Jericho.* One thing that puzzles and distresses young readers is that every living thing (man, woman and child) in Jericho was "devoted" to destruction, and that this was done by Jehovah's command. How can this be reconciled with what we are teaching the children about God, on the authority of Jesus? It cannot, and we ought to be clear about this once for all. The explanation is simple. To blot out your enemies, with their children, was the custom of the age. The Hebrews, therefore, believed this was right and their duty. And they naturally and rightly, from their standpoint, believed this was the will of God. Every religious mind will say that what we believe to be right *is* the will of God. We ought to do nothing that we *do not* believe to be God's will. But we may be mistaken, and we may learn better. Now the Hebrews were mistaken, and here again the great truth of the Progressiveness of Revelation comes to

our aid. God could only reveal the truth about Himself and about conduct gradually. And Israel was still at a primitive stage.

B. Notes

Chapter iii. 15. *Jordan overfloweth* : "Usually Jordan is about 100 feet wide, and shallow ; but in harvest time (April and May) it overflows its banks and attains a width of a mile" (Glazebrook). This was what happened now.

Chapter v. 15. *Put off thy shoes*. In the East, where turbans are worn, reverence is shown by doffing, not the headgear, but the sandals.

Chapter vi. 4. *seven*. Acts repeated seven times have, it is believed in the East, a magical efficacy (Glazebrook).

Verses 17-19. *accursed* : R.V. "devoted," i.e. to destruction. The word is the same as "holy" in ¹⁹, belonging to God, and, in the case of living creatures, to be destroyed.

C. The Lesson

1. The death of Moses ; and the new Leader. The new great enterprise needs youth and strength. It is a great task. Look at the map. The land is full of high hills and low valleys which were difficult for Israel because she had no chariots, and there were many fierce tribes to be overcome.

2. This lesson shows us that no difficulties are too great to be overcome by faith and courage. Look at these difficulties here.

(1) *The Jordan*. A deep gash in the earth's surface,

about 1,200 feet here below the sea, with a river swollen by the winter rains. That was serious ! But God is with His people and when they advance resolutely in faith He clears away obstacles. He used a thing that often occurs here, a landslide, to take the people over safely. And they ever after remembered this.

(2) *Jericho*. Next came the famous "City of Palm Trees," a city which was the key of the land. Here again faith and courage had their reward. The place fell before a people who feared nothing because God was with them. The story expresses this poetically by saying that the walls fell down flat. And that was the truth. Something happened here which needs to be explained, the statement that God commanded every living thing to be destroyed (see before).

3. Now the great lesson in these stories is one that has been often amplified. When Mohammed was being sought by his enemies, and he and his one faithful follower were hiding in a cave, his companion said, "We are but two." "No," said Mohammed, "We are three ; there is God." That faith enabled him to conquer all his enemies. The whole story of William of Orange shows the same thing. And that of Bruce and Alfred and Joan of Arc.

4. We also with God's help (which is never denied), with courage and faith can go forward to meet any difficulties. Jesus says that faith can remove mountains. "All things are possible to him that believeth" (cf. Heb. 13^{5, 6} with Josh. 1⁵). When Bishop Patteson was in the South Sea Islands he had sometimes to face terrible danger. Not seldom an arrow was pointed at his breast. "It was his custom to look the archer

full in the face with his bright smile, and that look of cheery confidence and goodwill made the weapon drop." In a time of acute danger David Livingstone sat down and wrote in his diary, "I read that Jesus came and said, 'I am with you always, even to the end of the world.' It is the word of a gentleman of the most sacred and strictest honour, and there is an end on't." In this confidence he faced the danger and it faded away.

XXVI. ACHAN'S TRESPASS SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

JOSHUA 7

A. For the Teacher

1. The Incident. The story of Achan has a double interest, historical and moral. It shows how primitive were the ideas of the people at this time, and even of the narrator himself, about both sin and the character of God. The key to the moral and religious difficulty is again the fact that Revelation was necessarily a growth. The fierce punishment of Achan and his family was according to the custom of the time, and was naturally attributed to God because it was thought to be right. The story also presents an admirable opportunity for moral instruction.

2. Corporate Responsibility. The reason why it was thought right that Achan's family should be put to death with him is that the sense of individual responsibility had not yet been born. The whole clan or family was responsible when a member of it did an evil thing. The family was a whole and the act of one

as the act of all. This belief had its advantages because, in the absence of our modern police system, the family or clan would control the individuals. Thus kind of primitive justice was the result, and no doubt in the whole it worked for peace and order. Later, however, the idea became intolerable when there was government that could punish the individual. And we find Ezekiel (18) protesting against it and laying down the truth that every man should be punished only for his own sin. This was a great discovery and was one of the notable stages in the development of the Jews.

3. The word "accursed" occurs several times in this chapter. The real meaning is "devoted," i.e. to destruction. The reason why things belonging to the Canaanites were so devoted was that Israel was to keep itself free of all taint. The latter history shows how necessary this injunction was, for the Canaanites, living among the Israelites, were a constant source of evil influence to Israel.

B. Notes

Verse 2. *Ai*: probably a few miles south-east of Bethel.

Verse 5. *Shebarim*: R.V. margin reads "to the quarries."

Verse 6. *put dust*: a usual expression of grief (1 Sam. 4¹², 2 Sam. 1²).

Verse 9. *what wilt . . . name?* What will the heathen think of Thee if Thou dost allow Thy people to be defeated? The common idea that God's favour means worldly success, persisted in even till to-day.

Verse 14. *the Lord shall take . . .* i.e. by lot, the common way of finding out God's will (1 Sam. 14⁴¹, 10²⁰⁻²⁴).

Verse 19. *give glory*, etc. Sin has taken away God's glory, confession can restore it (Glazebrook).

Verse 21. *Babylonish*. Israel came from Babylonia and probably trade went on between the two countries.

Verse 25. Stoning was the customary Jewish punishment. (Cf. the death of Stephen.)

C. *The Lesson*

1. *Achan's Sin*. Theft due to greed. But notice its gravity. It was *disobedience* to God. It was *dishonesty*. And it was *disloyalty* to his own people, because they were on their honour not to touch anything belonging to the enemy. It was therefore a sin against his people and against God.

2. *Its Result*. The defeat at Ai is attributed directly to this sin. And the deep truth in that is that sin inevitably weakens the will because it corrupts the conscience. Shakespeare (*Henry VI*) says :

"What's stronger breastplate than a heart untainted ?
Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just ;
And he but naked, though locked up in steel,
Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted."

Also note how the evil in one spreads like a miasma. One boy will poison a class in school or college or home or workshop. One sin, therefore, will corrupt not only the sinner but many others. How hard it is for a prodigal's *family* to hold up their heads in the world !

3. *Its Punishment*. The horrible death by stoning

and burning was according to the custom of the time. The punishment of the family with Achan was also due to custom. The conception of God as a fierce, harsh Being was due to the imperfect knowledge of God. It was not God, but the ideas of the time that slew Achan and his family. Of course the idea that we are punished for the sin of others is *untrue*. God never punishes one for another's sin. The idea that He does is one from which Israel grew away (Ezek. 18). At the same time it is *true* that sin is always punished. Not by physical death or misfortune necessarily. You are not to imagine death or misfortune the punishment of sin. But sin never escapes, and the punishment is always just because God is not only loving but righteous also. Sin never escapes, as we can see in hundreds of instances. Yet God is always anxious to save the sinner from his sin and turn his punishment into a blessing. Tell the story of Romola as an instance of retribution and use the fable of the Furies in Greek mythology.

XXVII. THE CONQUEST OF CANAAN

THE VICTORY OF FAITH

JUDGES 1, 3⁶⁻⁷; JOSHUA 15⁶³

A. For the Teacher

1. *An Imperfect Conquest.* The passages cited above show that the possession of Canaan by Israel was very partial. Israel conquered the hill country. The Canaanites remained in the lower plains and valleys. The result of this was very important. It meant that

a subtle and dangerous religious influence was being exerted all the time. The sensuous worship of Baal was very attractive to a simple people, and Israel was deeply tainted with it. So much so that from this time the constant theme of reformers and prophets was the evil of idolatry. It was the "enemy." This provided Elijah's task. And also that of Amos and Hosea.

2. *Isolated Efforts.* The conquest, besides being imperfect, was made by a series of individual efforts on the part of the tribes. It is a mistake to suppose that the campaigns and heroic deeds recounted in the book of Judges were those of "Israel." They are accounts of the sporadic movements of separate tribes. Ehud was leader of a Benjamite effort, Gideon of a movement by Ephraim and Manasseh, Samson of one by Dan, Othniel of one by Judah. The campaign against Sisera was the nearest approach to a confederacy of the tribes that was reached. Each of these warlike movements was led by a tribal hero. These men are called "judges," but the word means "deliverer" also, and they were really tribal heroes who, like Garibaldi, headed important patriotic campaigns, and then ruled the tribe for a time. As a matter of fact this was Israel's "heroic period" and may be illustrated and paralleled by the state of England in the time of Alfred. The fight was bitter on all hands, for there were many powerful enemies who were more civilized than Israel herself.

3. *Anarchy and Disunion.* It is not wonderful that the condition of the land was chaotic. There was no settled government, and people did what was right in

their own eyes (*Judges 17⁶*). This was due, first of all, to geographical conditions. The land of Palestine is made up of hills and valleys, and the differences of climate and country are so great that the people inhabiting the land have always been tribes, never a homogeneous people. The barriers made by nature have separated them off from one another. Another reason for the want of unity was the jealousy of the tribes. Several of them claimed primacy and none was willing to yield it. Deborah's Song makes this clear.

4. *Primitive Conditions.* The results of the disunion referred to were: (1) A primitive sort of government. The "Cities of Refuge" are an instance. If there had been a strong government there would have been no need for these. They were a proof that there was no real authority. (2) A low moral standard. Deeds of violence were common, property was insecure, blood feuds were waged (see the stories of Micah, Jael, Samson, Ehud). Yet there burned the fire of a true patriotism and the story of Ruth shows the existence of a pure family life. (3) A backward religious condition. The story of Micah in *Judges 17, 18* is a vivid picture of the naive religious ideas of the time. Images were used. Anyone could be a priest, though an official was preferred. Still there are signs of a genuine religious life. It was religion that inspired the "judges." The rise of Nazirites with their lofty ideals shows the reality of religion. The appearance of prophets in Samuel's time must have been prepared for by a real religious life.

5. *Transition.* It must not be forgotten that this period is an important one because it saw the passage of Israel from a nomadic, pastoral life to an agricultural

life. They left the open steppe "with its free life and severity" and settled down to cultivate land as farmers. It was a momentous change, in some ways very much for the worse. Religiously and morally it was, for a time at least, a step down. The Canaanites were among the Hebrews. The latter needed to learn much from them, they intermarried with them (*Judges 3⁵⁻⁷*), and the result was an influence for evil morally and religiously.

6. *Power of Faith.* In spite of all the foregoing, Israel conquered. And moreover the religion of Jehovah conquered the religion of Baal. And the reason is to be found in the true and living faith that burned in Israel. The torch never was put out. Moses had lit it and the victory of Israel is a great witness to the work of Moses. The leaders who rose at this time were believing and faithful men. Israel came through because she clung to Jehovah. This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

XXVIII. DEBORAH SHIRKERS AND HEROES JUDGES 2, 4 and 5

A. For the Teacher

1. *The Book of Judges.* This book consists of a series of heroic tales set in a framework of editorial comment. The editor's comment is a kind of philosophy of history. "The children of Israel forsook the Lord and went after other gods. As a result they were overcome and oppressed by an enemy. Then they

cried to the Lord and He raised up a deliverer." That is the invariable account of these incidents. It is a good philosophy, the only defect being that the editor regards the stories as describing the action of all Israel in each case, whereas the stories themselves tell us that the incidents were experiences of detached tribes against local enemies.

2. *Age of Transition.* It must be remembered that this was a period when Israel was "finding its feet." Israel was being slowly forged in the fire of trial into a nation. It was a period of fierce fighting and may be called Israel's heroic age. It reminds us of England in the time of Alfred, or Scotland in the time of Wallace and Bruce. Naturally the morality of the time was primitive. The terrible things done by Jael and Gideon and Samson and Ehud were characteristic of a rough period; and Deborah's approval of Jael's treachery only shows that the knowledge of right conduct was as much a growth as the knowledge of God.

3. There are two accounts of the story of Deborah and Barak, one in prose and one in poetry. The poem belongs to the period when the events occurred. It is the oldest poem in the Bible and has been described (by R. H. Hutton) as "the greatest war song of any age or nation." It gives a vivid account of the state of the nation at the time, as well as of the battle and its sequel, and should be read to the class at the close of the lesson.

4. *The Plain of Esdraelon.* The battle took place in the broad plain which stretches from the sea to the Jordan. This was the "cockpit" of Palestine. Many of the great battles of sacred history took place here.

It was a kind of football pitch to which opponents resorted to settle their differences (see G. A. Smith or Henderson's *Palestine*).

5. As noted before, the evils of this time were largely due to the disunion among the tribes. This was partly the result of jealousy and of course resulted in Israel remaining for long weak and unsuccessful. The greatest effort made for union was Deborah's summons to the tribes to come to the help of the Lord. But only six responded, and Deborah denounces the others for their slackness. This was the only considerable effort at united action. Union came only later with the kingship

B. Notes

Chapter iv. 2. *Hazor* : 3 miles south-west of Kadesh.

Harosheth : on the west side of the Plain on the right bank of the Kishon.

Verse 3. *chariots of iron* : shod with iron. The want of chariots was one cause of the Israelites being confined to the hilly country. They could not conquer the valleys.

Verse 5. *Ramah* : north-west of Bethel.

Verse 6. *Kedesh-naphtali* : just west of Lake Merom, different from the Kadesh in the south of Palestine. *Tabor* : a hill on the east side of the plain, an ideal post for the Israelite host.

Verse 8. *If thou wilt go . . .* Barak naturally wished to be assured of the presence of the prophetess who represented the help of God.

Verse 14. *is not the Lord gone out . . .* Probably she pointed to the signs of a storm which would help the Israelites (Glazebrook).

Verse 19. *bottle of milk*: i.e. a skin of milk.

Verse 21. *nail of the tent*: i.e. a tent pin. It was a woman's work to drive in the tent pins, therefore the hammer and pin would be familiar to her (Glazebrook).

Chapter v. 4. *out of Seir*. God comes out of Seir in a thunderstorm. Seir was the range of which Sinai was a peak, some writers think.

Verse 8. *was there a shield*? Israel had been disarmed by her oppressors.

Verse 12. *thy captivity*: rather either "captives" or "captors."

Verse 14. *Machir*: Manasseh.

Verse 17. *Gilead*: used for Gad, who lived there.

Verse 19. *Taanach and Megiddo*: at the south-west of the Plain.

took no gain: i.e. fought for fame not money.

Verse 20. *stars . . . fought*. This refers to the storm which filled the Kishon and made the Plain a bog.

Verse 21. *river Kishon*. A stream that in summer is very small, but in winter is swollen to a torrent. It rises in Gilboa and flows to the sea. The Canaanites had to cross it when the storm had made it dangerous.

Verse 25. *butter*: rather curdled milk, which is a great delicacy among the Bedawin even to-day.

C. The Lesson

1. The condition of the tribes (see the Song). Disunion. Selfishness. Separate conflicts with separate foes. Here, in this story, the greatest of them all, because it was an effort to bring all the tribes together

2. *The Story.* (1) The summons of Deborah to the tribes to rouse them to the help of the Lord. (2) The gathering of the tribes. Those that came, those that refused. Deborah's scathing denunciation of the latter. (3) The battle of the Plain. Position of Israel on the slopes of Tabor. The storm which made the Plain a bog and made the chariots of the Canaanites useless. The charge of the Israelites and its overwhelming success. (4) Flight of Sisera and the treachery of Jael. (5) The tragic picture of Sisera's mother waiting in vain for her son.

3. The call of God and how men respond to it. The two classes, Shirkers and Heroes. How we saw the same situation in the Great War. Patriotism means sacrifice. Religion means sacrifice. Three great examples of this: Joan of Arc, Florence Nightingale, and Jesus. The call of to-day.

4. Read the Poem, Judges 5.

XXIX. GIDEON
GOD'S USE FOR THE HUMBLE
JUDGES 6-8

A. For the Teacher

1. Few stories are more entralling to the child than that of Gideon. The fleece, the test at the stream, the lamps and pitchers, the dream and the rout—are all favourite episodes. But, just because of this, the teacher must keep always in view a single motive in the lesson and not be taken off to side-issues. The main point is what a humble man can do if God is with

him. The moral defects in the hero are just the defects of his time, his cruelty to the two chiefs, his relapse into idolatry. Gideon was not above his age, but he was God's man and gave his life to the purpose of God, and this is the one thing to be dwelt on. Gideon could not have done his work if he had not been a man of his age.

2. The Midianites were a Bedawin people who roamed over the country south of Canaan. They descended on Canaan just when the harvest was ready and carried it off. They made a series of raids and did not stay in the country. Their opportunity lay in the disunion and weakness of the tribes. Their special prey was the fertile district north of Judea in which Manasseh and Ephraim were settled.

B. Notes

Chapter vi. 2. *dens and caves.* The hill country of Palestine is limestone and therefore easily broken up. The country was full of caves which were used for refuge by robbers, for tombs to bury people (Jesus was buried in a cave), and for hiding-places.

Verse 11. *Ophrah*: in Manasseh, near the Plain of Esdraelon.

winepress. Grain was usually threshed on an exposed height so that the wind could blow away the chaff. The winepress was a concealed hollow. Gideon used it to conceal his operations from the Midianites.

Verses 20, 21. The food is turned into a sacrifice by the angel.

Verses 22, 23. The common belief was that no one could see God and live (see Exod. 33²⁰).

Verse 24. *Jehovah-shalom*: Jehovah is peace.

Chapter vii. 1. “*Harod*, a large spring which flows out of the foot of Mount Gilboa, into the valley of *Jezreel*” (Glazebrook).

Moreh, Little Hermon: a hill 4 miles north of Harod.

Verse 4. What was the test? The simplest answer is that the men who kept their eyes on the foe while drinking and thus were ready were chosen. They revealed their character unconsciously, as we all do in unguarded acts.

Verse 13. Dreams were considered to be a revelation of God’s will. The cake of barley bread represented Gideon and his small band. Barley bread was the food of the poor. The tent represented the nomad Midianites.

Verse 19. *middle watch*: about eleven o’clock.

Verse 22. All these places are on the route to the east in the Jordan valley and beyond.

Verse 25. *Oreb and Zeeb*: i.e. Raven and Wolf. Animal names for tribes are common among Arabs.

Chapter viii. 1-3. “A soft answer turneth away wrath.”

Verse 8. *Penuel*: near the Jabbok on the east of Jordan.

Verse 16. *Gideon’s cruelty* is characteristic of the time. Cf. David’s act (2 Sam. 12³¹).

Verse 22. *Rule thou*. A first tentative effort at getting a king.

Verse 24. *Earrings* were worn by men, noserings by women (Glazebrook).

“*Ishmaelites*” is a term used for nomad tribes as commonly as Midianites (see Gen. 37²⁵).

Verse 26. About 170 lbs.

Verse 27. An ephod is by some supposed to have been an image of Jehovah. So powerful was the influence of the Canaanite neighbours. From this time we see the same thing often.

C. The Lesson

1. Another story of the heroes by whom the land was won and the enemy defeated.

2. *The Story.* The steps are as follows : (1) The raids by nomad tribes (6¹⁻⁶). (2) The call of the young farmer to deliver his people (6¹¹⁻²⁴). (3) The first act of his zeal, destruction of Baal's altar (6²⁵⁻³²). (4) The signs (6³³⁻⁴⁰). (5) The test (7¹⁻⁸). (6) The dream (7⁹⁻¹⁵). (7) The rout (7¹⁶⁻²¹). (8) The pursuit (8¹⁻²¹).

3. Lay aside the defects of Gideon. He was a man of his time, as all the Bible characters were. They had to learn very slowly what goodness means, and they were far back. But in one thing Gideon stands out for us, he gave himself to God to be used for His ends and trusted God and took God with him, and so God used him to do a great service.

4. Parallels to this in the Bible : David the shepherd boy ; Amos the herdman ; Andrew the fisherman ; Joseph the prisoner. In history : Joan of Arc ; Luther the miner's son ; Carey the Northampton cobbler, who became one of the greatest of missionaries ; and Giotto, a shepherd lad, who became one of the greatest painters in history, and the pioneer in Christian art. Or tell the story of Zita, the little servant-maid of Lucca in Italy. She had a small wage, but she saved up every penny she could and bought cloth which she made into garments for the poor in her few spare hours. She

did this all through a long life during which she remained in one situation. Her deeds became known all over Italy, and after her death the Pope made her a saint. She is called Santa Zita, and all the servant maids of Lucca gather at her tomb once a year on her birthday, and place flowers on it. Think of the influence of such a life !

5. What a humble man can do who has faith in God and courage in his heart. Note these points : (1) How much needs to be done to-day by courageous men. (2) We also may have doubts of our ability to do anything. So had Moses and Jeremiah and others. But it is not our merit that counts but our willingness, and God's power. (3) The humblest instrument when fitted by God can do the greatest deed for the world.

XXX. JEPHTHAH

PROMISES

JUDGES 11-12⁷

A. For the Teacher

1. Another local conflict. Interesting because the tribe concerned (Manasseh) was on the east side of Jordan, and also because the story presents another instance of the wild savagery of this period of transition. The freebooter, the horrid vow, the massacre at the Jordan—all this sets the "heroic" age before us in its true colours.

2. *Jephthah's Vow.* It is surprising that there should be any controversy as to whether Jephthah carried out his vow. The narrative tells us he did. There would

be nothing abhorrent to the man of that age in the sacrifice of even a loved daughter. The fact that efforts are made to prove that Jephthah did not do anything so cruel only shows how false an idea of inspiration is entertained. If we realize that people at this period were immature morally, even leaders and heroes whom God used, we shall have no difficulty. Jephthah was raised up to do one particular piece of work for God, but that does not mean that he was a mature Christian.

3. There are two subjects suggested by the story, and teachers must concentrate on the one that is dominant. There is the subject of vows, and there is the beautiful spirit of loyal surrender to duty on the part of Jephthah's daughter. The main point of the story is Jephthah's conduct. If he vowed to sacrifice "what" first met him, not dreaming that it would be a person, then the question arises, Should a man keep a foolish and rash vow? If, on the other hand, he really meant a human sacrifice the answer is easy. From the point of view of his own age he was right, because such sacrifices were common, and the tragedy fills us with horror, as well as admiration for father and daughter. In any case the point to be dealt with is that of the making and keeping of promises.

B. Notes

Chapter xi. 3. *vain fellows*: cf. 1 Sam. 22².

Verse 11. *Mizpah*. There were two places of this name, one in Benjamin, the other (meant here) in Gilead.

Verse 24. The idea here is that each god has authority in his own land. Beyond that land his power does not go. A primitive idea.

Verse 29. Part of the tribe of Manasseh was settled east of Jordan, and part in the centre of Palestine along with Ephraim. Hence Ephraim's anger (12¹).

Verse 30. "In hope of victory, or dread of disaster, men vowed, or devoted, to Jehovah something very precious—it might be a human life—believing they would thus propitiate His favour and secure His aid" (Peake).

Verse 31. Did Jephthah *mean* a human sacrifice? If "whatever" should be "whoever," as Peake and Glazebrook say, then he did mean it. But that is not at all certain.

Chapter xii. 1. Contrast Gideon's and Jephthah's treatment of the arrogant Ephraimites.

Verse 6. So in the "Sicilian Vespers," A.D. 1282, the French betrayed themselves when asked to pronounce *ceci* and *ciceri*. Those who said the *C* as an *S* were killed, because the Italian pronunciation is "tch."

C. The Lesson

1. Here is another story of the wild times when there was no fixed government in Israel. Every tribe was fighting for its existence, this time Manasseh beyond Jordan. The enemy was Ammon, a tribe that inhabited the south-west part of the country on the east of Jordan.

2. *The Hero of the Story*, Jephthah. His birth. His harsh treatment at home. An outcast, he turns free-booter, like Ishmael, like David. The Robin Hood of old Israel gathered wild men about him like these others.

3. *The Deputation*. Jephthah's fame as a soldier

and leader turned his people's thoughts to him when they were in danger. He was their only hope. Their request and his bargain.

4. *The Vow.* Jephthah, a deeply religious man, though rough, went to the tribal sanctuary at Mizpah to ask God's blessing. His vow, characteristic of the time. There was nothing wrong to *them* in such a vow. But the terms of it were foolish, just like what an impetuous man would promise. Did he *mean* a human sacrifice? Probably not.

5. *The Campaign and Victory.*

6. *His Return.* His daughter came out to meet him to celebrate the victory, like Miriam (Exod. 15²⁰), and the women who sang about David (1 Sam. 18⁶). The dilemma. He had promised rashly. What was he to do? He felt he had to keep his promise to God. A dreadful tragedy made more poignant by the beautiful spirit of the daughter. Compare the story of Iphigenia, and read Byron's poem in *Hebrew Melodies* and Tennyson's *My God, my land, my father* (given in Glazebrook).

7. *Was he Right?* If he vowed rashly, not meaning to sacrifice a human life, he was wrong, because to keep a vow that is itself wrong is to do evil. E.g. the story of Herod and the Baptist. If you promise to help any one in a bad action and then realize its badness it is worse to keep such a promise. But this only shows how careful we should be in making promises, because if we promise anything that is right we must keep the promise faithfully.

XXXI. SAMSON
THE PLACE OF THE BODY
JUDGES 13-16

A. For the Teacher

1. The feature of Samson's exploits is that they were single-handed. He did not lead his tribe into battle ; he did everything himself. These stories must have been very popular, there is such an element of humour in many of them, and the kind of cleverness in turning the tables on his enemies which people love to hear about. His personal character, indeed, is so unworthy that it is difficult to believe that God could use such a man. But we have constantly to remember that these heroes were men of their age, and God uses very imperfect instruments in every age.

2. The Philistines were the last, and by far the most formidable, of the enemies who disputed the possession of Canaan with Israel. For a long time it seemed doubtful which would be the victor, and it was not till the time of David that the issue was decided. The Philistines were invaders of the land like Israel. They came from Crete and were a powerful, warlike and highly civilized race, much superior in these respects to Israel. They settled in a rich plain, right on the great trade route, and derived much of their power from trade. The little tribe of Dan occupied a territory just next to the Philistine country and was therefore exposed to the incursions and oppression of this fierce enemy.

3. The story of Samson is quite unsuitable for young children, but, taught with tact and in the right spirit, it may be used with profit for higher classes who

are at an age when sex has begun to make itself felt.

4. The teacher should, of course, read Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, which, though in some respects giving an erroneous impression of certain aspects of the story, has a vivid rendering of the tale as a whole.

B. Notes

Chapter xiii. 2. *Zorah*: about 17 miles west of Jerusalem.

family of Danites: "family" and not tribe, because most of the Danites had migrated to the north. Only a skeleton of the tribe was left.

Verse 5. *Nazarite*: one who lived under a vow to abstain from wine and from cutting the hair.

Verse 12. Manoah asks two questions: (1) about the upbringing of the child, and (2) about his occupation.

Verse 18. *secret*: R.V. "wonderful," i.e. Jehovah.

Verse 19. *a rock*: R.V. "the rock," probably a rock altar (see the story of Gideon).

Verse 24. *Samson*, from "Shemesh" the sun, i.e. the "sunny one."

Verse 25. *Spirit of the Lord*. All great exploits were regarded as due to the Divine Spirit.

Chapter xiv. 1. *Timnath*: 4 miles south-west of Zorah, bordering on the Philistine country.

Verse 4. *he sought*. "He" is Jehovah.

Verses 5, 6. *a young lion*. "The Syrian lion is not nearly such a formidable beast as the African. Pausanias tells how a Greek athlete called Polydamas killed a lion with his bare hands on Mount Olympus" (Glazebrook). (See exploits of Benaiah)

and David, 1 Sam. 17³⁴⁻³⁶; 2 Sam. 23²⁰; also Hercules and the Nemean lion.)

Verse 12. *Linen garments*: i.e. loose cloaks which served as blankets by night.

Verse 20. *companion*: the “best man.”

Chapter xv. 8. *Etam*: a few miles south-east of Zorah.

Verse 15. *new jawbone*: literally moist, i.e. not dried up and therefore a better weapon.

Verse 19. *in the jaw*: rather “in Lehi” (which means “jawbone”).

Chapter xvi. 1. *Gaza*: a frontier city of the Philistines. It gave great trouble to our troops in the Great War.

Verse 3. The distance from Gaza is 40 miles!

Verse 4. *valley of Sorek*: “runs down from near Jerusalem to the Philistine plain” (Glazebrook).

Verse 5. *pieces of silver*: shekels, 2s. 6d. each. Each of the lords was to give her about £150.

Verse 7. *green withs*: i.e. new bowstrings of gut, strongest when new.

Verse 23. *Dagon*: a Semitic god of agriculture who had temples in Canaan before the Philistines came there. The old idea, widely current owing to Milton, that he was a fish god, is wrong. The Philistines adopted the native worship.

Verse 25. *make us sport*: i.e. by exhibiting feats of strength.

between the pillars. The temple had a wide porch with a roof supported on two pillars. The pillars were of wood and only kept in place by pressure, so that a powerful pull might remove them.

C. The Lesson

1. The Israelites had their popular hero as the Greeks had Hercules, and the English Hereward the Wake, both very like Samson. Such a character is strong and brave and witty, but often very imperfect.

2. *Samson's Dedication.* (What God meant by His instructions to the parents. Samson was to be brought up simply and severely to be a powerful weapon in God's hands.) *Samson's fitness for his task*, his strength and his courage. *His exploits*—the lion, the gates, the foxes. *His weakness* : how often one weak spot in a character is like the heel of Achilles, his only vulnerable point. In Samson's case it was his sensual passion. The women who led him astray and ultimately proved his ruin. This weakness neutralized all his strength and threw him, a mere wreck, on the shore like a battered ship in a storm. The tragedy of this.

3. How could God use such a man ? God has to use what instruments are available. God's instruments are always imperfect. But it has to be remembered that all God can do and does in this world He does *through us*. He does nothing without our help. We are necessary to Him. And what makes us really a help to God is our obedience to His will. Sin, and especially sins like Samson's, spoil a life and ruin its happiness and above all prevent God using it for His great ends.

4. The place of the body and its desires. Yielding to bodily desires was Samson's ruin. But are the impulses of the body wrong ? No, they are good, beautiful, sacred, and of God's ordinance. But they have to be kept

in their place. The body is a good servant but a bad master. And the way to meet and overcome temptations to sensual sin is simply to live in an atmosphere where sin dies out of itself. "Live on the top storey," says Professor Drummond.

XXXII. RUTH

LOYALTY

RUTH 1-4

A. For the Teacher

1. For all the wildness and turbulence of the period of the Judges there was another side to the life of the people, and we have it here in the record of a simple, kindly, humane life. Most modern critics date the writing of the book after the Exile. But it is more likely that it was written as a companion picture to Judges. A writer after the exile would not have written so genially of mixed marriages. It is a book "sacred to the lowly and the poor," the heroine finding her happiness in duty and in the service of a beautiful home love. It is a pastoral symphony after the martial music of Judges. It is certainly a lovely idyll, handed down with consummate grace and tenderness.

2. The motive of the writer was to show how an alien woman embraced the true religion and became an ancestress of David. But as teachers we are much more interested in the constancy and simplicity of Ruth, and that is the master motive of the lesson.

3. Famine, which drove Elimelech to Moab, was a frequent experience in Canaan. It drove Abraham to

Egypt and Jacob's sons to the same quarter. This famine was due to the failure of rain, on which all the fertility of Canaan depended. Moab was not far away. Its mountains were a frowning rampart on the other side of the Dead Sea. Lot fled to them after the destruction of Sodom. Its God was Chemosh, but Elimelech and Naomi seem to have been able to preserve their own faith in an alien land.

4. There are several interesting customs illustrated by this story. (1) The young woman on her marriage was absorbed by her husband's clan. Hence the presence of the two girls with Naomi. It was the opposite of the western custom, "A son is a son till he gets a wife, but a daughter's a daughter all her life." (2) The function of the "near kinsman" was very important in Hebrew family life. If a man sold himself or his property it was the "Goel's" duty to redeem him or it ; if he was killed the Goel was the avenger of blood ; if he died without personal issue, the part of the Goel was to prevent the patrimony passing to strangers (Peake). (3) Spreading the skirt over a maiden was symbolic. It meant that the Goel was ready to do his part by wedding and protecting one who would otherwise be friendless, and so prevent the inheritance being alienated.

B. Notes

Chapter i. 2. *Ephrath* : a district round Bethlehem.

Verse 20. *Naomi* : "my sweet one." *Marah* = bitter.

Verse 22. The beginning of barley harvest was in April.

Chapter ii. 2. It was a law in Israel, following an old

custom, that the poor, the orphan, the stranger, and the widow should be allowed to glean in the harvest fields.

Verses 8-9. The young men reaped while the maidens collected the sheaves.

Verse 17. *ephah* : nearly a bushel.

Chapter iii. 4. "The peasants of Palestine still sleep in the open air at the threshing time" (Peake).

Chapter iv. 5. Rather "Thou must buy Ruth also" : a remnant of an old custom when wives were purchased.

C. The Lesson

1. *Point of Contact.* We have been reading tales of blood and slaughter and cruelty. But here is a glimpse of the home life which was going on all the time. Another way of introducing the lesson would be the following. What is the best thing in a friend ? Various answers. But the best is loyalty. What is loyalty ? Well, here is a story that tells that.

2. The steps or mental pictures in the story : (1) In Moab (1^{1-9}). (2) The Parting of the Ways (1^{10-22}). (3) The gleaning (2). (4) Ruth and Boaz (3). (5) The Kinsman (6^{1-12}). (6) The Wedding (6^{13-22}).

3. This is loyalty, the finest thing in friendship, the way Ruth behaved to Naomi. It means faithfulness, i.e. standing by your friend in adversity as in prosperity. And it means endurance, i.e. never letting go, never tiring in your friendship.

4. How you can show loyalty to a friend. Take the story of Orestes and Pylades, or David and Jonathan. Or take the beautiful scene from *Guy Mannering*, where

Dominie Sampson declares his undying loyalty to Lucy Bertram. Read it, or read the lovely little poem by Tennyson beginning "Love flew in at the window." Or you may show loyalty to a *Cause*. Look at the way men gathered to the nation's defence in the Great War. Look at the Covenanters. Look at the Jacobites. Or, above all, you may show loyalty in *religion*, to *Christ*. Contrast the denial of Peter with the devotion of Paul. Contrast the rich young ruler with the martyrs, Latimer, or the young woman, Margaret Wilson, who perished in the Solway. But this loyalty is as much needed at the present day and in *our* life. How?

XXXIII. THE CALL OF SAMUEL

HOW GOD SPEAKS TO US

1 SAMUEL 1-3

A. For the Teacher

1. *The Situation.* We are again at the beginning of a new era. After the rough and undisciplined period of the Judges we are hardly prepared for the situation which we find at the birth of Samuel. There are in existence both a central worship, with a "temple" at Shiloh, and a central government. Either Deborah's effort to secure a national unity was more successful than we imagined, or the menace from the Philistines had drawn the people together to seek God and to join in a common effort. This may account for the position of authority which we suddenly find Eli exerting and for the influence of the sanctuary at Shiloh.

2. Shiloh lies on the north of Bethel. It was a

sanctuary from a very early period. It lost much of its sanctity after the Ark was taken. The temple at Shiloh was a solid building of wood, with probably one large room for the Ark (used also as a sleeping-place for the priests), and an outer court for the worshippers. In front of the temple was a seat for Eli where he officiated as judge in disputes and delivered guidance for the people's conduct.

3. Samuel was one of the greatest men in sacred history. He combined in his person three functions : he was a priest, a prophet, and a judge. He was the last of the judges and the first of the prophets. His greatness lies in his recognition of the necessity of the monarchy for the sake of national unity and deliverance from the enemy ; and in his readiness to give up first place and set the king above himself. Only the greatest men are capable of this self-abnegation. But his greatness lies also in this—that he was the father of Prophecy in Israel. Hitherto there had been here and there a prophet, but now prophecy became a national institution and a great national force, and this was due to Samuel.

4. The Song of Hannah is declared by critics to be a late composition. It implies the existence of the monarchy (¹⁰), and is placed here because of its reference to the barren woman (⁵). It is the obvious model of the Magnificat.

5. The books of Samuel and Kings are of the highest historical value. Much of their material is a contemporary record. As Professor Edward Meyer says, “it is genuine history.” This does not mean that it is like modern scientific history, but simply that the record is

near the events it narrates and may be relied on as a true picture of the time.

6. The story in chapter 3 may be taught either as the call of Samuel to his great mission or, more simply and for younger children, as an example of how God speaks to us. If the teacher chooses the former he is referred to the lessons on the calls of Abraham, Moses and Gideon for guidance. The second of these two lessons is the one chosen here.

B. Notes

Chapter i. 1. *Ramathaim-zophim* : rather "of Ramah, a Zuphite." Ramah was Samuel's home and was only 2 miles from Shiloh.

Verse 2. *Hannah* : Grace. *Peninnah* : Pearl.

Verse 3. At the great feast of ingathering or "Tabernacles." It was a sort of "Christmas from home." The meal partaken at the time was shared by the worshippers with the priest. Part of the animal was burned, part given to the priest, and the rest consumed by the people.

Verse 4. *portions* : i.e. of the animal sacrificed.

Verse 13. A terrible revelation of what happened at the sanctuary.

Verse 16. *a daughter of Belial* : i.e. a worthless woman. The derivation is uncertain.

Verse 20. Critics say this is not the real meaning of "Samuel," but at any rate this meaning embodies the aspiration of Hannah.

Verse 23. *until she weaned him* : i.e. until he was at least three years old.

Verse 24. *ephah* : a bushel. *bottle* : a wine-skin.

Chapter ii. 12-17. “ Burning the fat was an essential part of the sacrifice ; so that to cut off some of the flesh before this rite had been performed was gross irreverence and spoilt the whole act of worship ” (Peake).

Verse 25. *God shall judge him* : rather “ arbitrate ” between disputants.

Chapter iii. 1. *precious* : rare. *Open* : frequent.

Verse 3. *the lamp*. Enough oil was supplied in the lamp to last till morning, so that the phrase here means it was not yet morning.

C. *The Lesson*

1. Now we come to a time when things were not so confused and wild as in the time of the Judges. They were more settled. People were drawing together and drawing to God. Yet a great deal still that was wrong. Need of a leader who would teach the people and bring unity and deliverance. And so Samuel was sent.

2. *His Birth.* Hannah’s vow. In Scotland parents often used to dedicate a son to the ministry. The father of the great Scottish missionary, Dr. Laws, was a young carpenter who was led to God in a remarkable way. He vowed that if ever he had a son he would dedicate him to the work of a missionary. He kept his vow, and the career of Dr. Laws was the result.

3. *His Great Experience in the Sanctuary at Shiloh.* Note the steps, so clearly indicated by the successive utterances of the Divine voice. Close the “ presentation ” of the incident by saying that God gave Samuel a message for Eli, a very sad message. And this was the first of many messages God gave to Samuel as a prophet.

4. How often God has spoken to men, in the Bible story and outside. Moses, Abraham, St. Paul are examples in Scripture. Outside are Luther (when he was toiling up the "Holy Stairs" in Rome a voice said in his heart, "The just shall live by faith," and he at once rose up and walked out of the building, a free man !); Augustine (at a crisis in his life, when he was seeking God, he was in his garden and heard a voice saying "Tolle, lege," i.e. "Take up and read." He took up his Bible and the first verse he read brought the light to his soul); and Joan of Arc (when she was a little girl she often heard God's voice speaking to her. Once it said, "Be good, little Joan, and God will help you." Another time, "Be kind, little Joan, and God will make you a blessing to many." And again, "Be brave, little Joan, and God will make thee saviour of thy country").

5. Has He stopped speaking to people? No, He speaks to us *to-day*. How? In the Bible, in conscience, in Providence, in church, and in our hearts by His Spirit. Examples will readily be given by the children.

XXXIV. THE ARK

SUPERSTITION

1 SAMUEL 4-7²

A. For the Teacher

1. *The Ark.* This was an oblong box of acacia wood, which was regarded as the Shrine of Jehovah. His presence was closely associated with it. We may say that He was believed to dwell in it (Num. 10^{35, 36}). It was "the most ancient and most sacred of the religious

symbols of the Hebrew Nation" (Hastings, *B.D.*). It was carried at the head of the people on the march, and was borne like a flag into battle by the priests (Josh. 6). In the wilderness it was placed in the "tent of meeting," and later its home was in Shiloh for a time. Its contents cannot be ascertained with certainty. In any case the main idea at this time connected with it was the presence and even indwelling of Jehovah through this symbol. The people regarded it as a talisman.

2. Several of the incidents in these chapters furnish illustrations of the necessity of distinguishing between facts and the interpretation of facts. This is the key to many O.T. "difficulties." The plague at Bethshemesh, e.g., was a fact. The attribution of this slaughter to Jehovah's anger is the writer's interpretation. The plague spread from the Philistines to the people of Bethshemesh, perhaps through the cows, perhaps by rats or mice. This event and the consequent mortality would naturally be attributed to Jehovah by the ancient writer. We may accept the fact without the interpretation, since we know the interpretation was due to the writer's imperfect knowledge of God's character. The same remark applies to the plague among the Philistines.

B. Notes

Chapter iv. 1. *Aphek*: "on the border between the plain of Sharon and the hill country of Ephraim," not identified (Glazebrook).

Verse 4. *cherubims*. Very little is known of these figures, even of their shape and appearance. They were associated closely with Jehovah as guardians of sacred places, as attendants, as it were, upon Him.

Verse 13. *by the wayside*: rather “by the Gate (of the Temple) watching the way.”

Chapter v. 2. *Dagon*: the name of the native God of agriculture, a Canaanite deity adopted by the Philistines.

Verse 5. A very common ancient superstition, shared by people as different as the Israelites and Romans.

Verse 9. *they had emerods*: rather (R.V.) “tumours broke out upon them,” symptoms of bubonic plague.

Chapter vi. 3. *trespass offering*: R.V. guilt offering, to make up for a wrong done.

Verse 7. *on which there hath come*, etc.: i.e. as the animals were untrained, they would be regarded as following Divine guidance. An extra test was the taking away their calves. If, against nature, they left their young it could only be by Divine prompting.

Verse 9. *Bethshemesh*: a town on the border of the Philistine country.

Verse 14. *a great stone*: probably a stone altar (see Judges 6²⁰).

Verse 19. *looked into*: more correctly “looked at.”

Chapter vii. 1. *Kirjath-jearim*: 9 miles west of Jerusalem. It was probably under Philistine authority, and therefore the Ark was not really in Israelite custody all this time, and was not removed till David had conquered the Philistines.

C. The Lesson

1. *Introduction.* A brief description of the Ark and its history up till now. Here is a story about it.

2. *The Adventures of the Ark.* (1) The Israelites in

their distress turn to the Ark for help. God is in it, and therefore if it is present they will have His help. They send for it and hail its coming with shouts of joy. (2) But the presence of the Ark does not save them from defeat. (3) The capture of the Ark and its stay in the Philistine country. Events at Ashdod, Gath, Ekron. The bubonic plague attributed, by the Philistines themselves, to the presence of the Ark with them. "Let us get rid of this dreadful object!" (4) The dreadful slaughter at Bethshemesh. This due to the spread of the plague and is by the writer wrongly attributed to God. (5) The ultimate arrival of the Ark at Kirjath-jearim. This was an Israelite city, but it was under Philistine authority, so that the Ark was still lost to Israel. As a result religious life more and more decayed. The people had not even the *symbol* of God's presence!

3. The outstanding truth in all these incidents is that the people put something else in place of God Himself. That is superstition. And superstition is a great enemy of religion, one of the greatest. Put *anything* in place of God and you put Him further away from you. This is clear, if we put, e.g., a priest in place of God, or an image (idolatry), or a friend. But it is equally true if we put the Bible or the Church or a doctrine or a sacrament in place of God. The commonest mistake about religion is that going to church or believing in the Bible, or having correct beliefs about Christ, is religion. But none of these things is religion, which is simply living with God and sharing all your life with Him. The story of the Ark shows us how serious may be the consequences if we imagine that to have correct views or to go regularly to church is to have

God with us. These things are *helps*. God makes His presence known through them. But we must get beyond them to God Himself if we are to have His salvation.

XXXV. THE FIRST KING PROMOTION

1 SAMUEL 9-10¹⁶ and 11

Date 1025 B.C.

A. For the Teacher

1. There is no part of the O.T. narrative in which the existence of different accounts is more apparent than this. The curious contradictions in the story are thus easily explained. There appear to be two accounts of the appointment of Saul as King, one in 9¹, 10¹⁶ (the earlier), the other in 8 and 10¹⁷⁻²⁷. In the earlier Saul is chosen by Divine agency as the leader able to deliver the people from the Philistine yoke. His deliverance of Jabesh-Gilead proves his fitness, and thereafter the Divine choice is confirmed by the people's verdict. In the later account the demand for a king is regarded as treason to Jehovah's sovereignty, and all kinds of evils are predicted as a result of this step. As a matter of fact both pictures are true. The first is true because the monarchy had become a necessity if the people were to be united and its enemies defeated. What was needed was just what won the Great War, "unity of command." But at the same time, if the people had been loyal to Jehovah they would not have needed any such expedient. This ideal element is the truth in the second account.

2. We are at the beginning of a new epoch in the

election of the first king. Hebrew history has three great periods : (1) From Moses to the Monarchy (1200-1000 B.C.) ; (2) from Saul to the Exile (1000-586 B.C.) ; and (3) after the Exile. The second period was that of the Monarchy. It must be remembered that in Israel the theory of the Monarchy was that the king was the vicegerent of God. He was God's representative. Israel's system was a theocracy. That is why the king was guided by prophets who bore God's commands to him. Samuel appointed and deposed Saul. Nathan rebuked David. Elijah imposed obedience on Ahab. This point has to be remembered in a lesson on the first king. It is the central truth.

3. The most important fact in the events of this period is the rise of Prophecy. Hitherto there had been a prophet here and there. Now prophecy becomes an institution. We find prophets in schools, living together, trained for their career. They are revival preachers as well as political leaders. It is their work that accounts for the great revival of patriotism and religion which occurred now, and which led to the victory over the Philistines. The danger from the enemy drew the people together, and the preaching of the prophets made this unity a power because the people turned to God. From this time onward prophecy becomes the greatest power in Israel and the real instrument of Divine help. Samuel was the father of this new prophecy, and in this lies one of his titles to greatness. That is why he stands with Moses as a second founder of the nation.

4. The teacher should master Browning's great poem, *Saul*, at this period in the history.

B. Notes

Chapter ix. 1. *a mighty man of valour*: rather “a man of wealth.”

Verse 3. *asses*: the most valuable property of an Israelite.

Verse 4. *Shalisha* and *Shalim*: unknown.

Verse 5. *Zuph*: the district which contained Ramah.

Verse 6. *this city*: i.e. Ramah. Samuel is apparently not known to Saul.

Verse 8. *fourth part of a shekel*: about 9d.

Verse 13. *Ancient sacrifice* was always a meal at which the worshippers ate part of the victim.

Verse 19. *tell thee all*, etc.: i.e. answer your questions.

Possibly Saul was brooding on the condition of his people (Glazebrook).

Verse 20. An offer of the throne. “The honours of Israel, to whom do they belong? Are they not for you?” (Moffatt).

Verse 25. The house-top was used as a sleeping-place as well as a drawing-room. Saul spent the night there.

Chapter x. 2. The first of the three signs Saul was to receive.

Verse 3. *going up to God*: i.e. to sacrifice at the High Place. The verse describes the material for the sacrifice. This is the second sign.

Verse 5. The third sign: “*garrison*” is a scribe’s error for “prefect” or “resident,” a Philistine official in authority.

Psaltery, a large harp; *timbrel* or tabret, a small drum; *pipe*, a sort of reed; *harp*, a lyre.

Verse 12. *who is their father?* : i.e. they owe their gift to the direct inspiration of God, not to heredity.

Chapter xi. 1. *Make a covenant with us* : "make terms with us" (Moffatt).

Verse 3. *elders* : "sheiks" (Moffatt).

Verse 5. Like Cincinnatus in Roman story.

Verse 7. Like the Fiery Cross in Scott's *Lady of the Lake*.

Verse 8. *Bezek* : north-east of Shechem, a good rallying-place.

Verse 14. *Gilgal* : probably the Gilgal 18 miles north of Jerusalem.

C. *The Lesson*

1. The peril in which Israel stood from the Philistines. This roused the people and was the occasion of the revival produced through the prophets. Compare England under the Danes and England in the Spanish peril in Elizabeth's day. The leader of this revival was Samuel. He saw that a king was necessary in the circumstances if the people were to be led to victory.

2. *The King selected by God*. How full of promise the young man was ! Handsome, tall, modest and considerate (9⁵), and both prompt and brave in action (11). Altogether a choice character and kingly.

3. *The Story of Saul's Appointment*. (1) Search for the asses ; (2) Samuel and Saul at Ramah ; (3) Saul anointed ; (4) the three signs he received that he was God's chosen ; (5) his first exploit (11)⁶ ; and (6) chosen by the people.

4. *The Meaning of the Kingship*. Chosen not for honour to himself but as a servant of God's purpose.

The honour and responsibility were an opportunity, a trust. The king was always to regard himself as God's representative.

5. *So with all honour and all position.* It is not for profit or pleasure or fame to us, but for service. *Noblesse oblige.* This is the meaning of *promotion*. It is opportunity. It is a call. It is so with a minister, a teacher, a foreman, a judge, an M.P., everybody. There are two ways of thinking of life: as a means of getting for ourselves or as an opportunity of giving in service to God and man. The latter is the Christian way.

XXXVI. THE REJECTION OF SAUL

THE PERIL OF DISOBEDIENCE

1 SAMUEL 13-15

A. For the Teacher

1. The problem of Saul will only be solved by the teacher who understands that we are to judge both Samuel and Saul, and the incidents of their conflict, by the conditions of their own time and not by those of ours. Samuel represented the will of God. Through him Saul had been chosen and by him Saul was to be directed. And Saul came into direct conflict with this declared Divine will twice. The first occasion was at Gilgal (13). Our sympathies are with Saul, but we can see the traces of that self-will which made Saul impossible as a ruler. The second occasion was in connection with the war against Amalek (15). And again we feel that Saul represented the more humane conduct. But again we see Saul's self-will. It was

not humanity that moved Saul. He had turned the sacred war into a predatory campaign and spared Agag to grace his triumph. Saul was giving way to vanity and ambition. In short he was renouncing the condition on which alone he had been made king, that he was to be God's instrument. And the nation needed not only a brave soldier, which Saul was, but a moral and religious leader, which he was not. God cannot use a man who ceases to be true to God's will. That is the general truth of the story, and we can see its soundness.

2. The narrative reveals clearly the primitive state of religion and morality at this time. All the actors are led by omens through which the Divine will was supposed to be declared. The vow still had its sacred place in life. Samuel's savage conduct towards Agag shows how far the age was still away from a humane morality (contrast this incident with *Isaiah 53*). But the story told in these chapters is thrilling in its vividness and simple power.

B. Notes

Chapter xiii. 2. *Michmash* : 7 miles north of Jerusalem.

Verse 3. *garrison* : rather "prefect" or "governor."

Verse 5. *in Michmash* : i.e. after driving Saul out.

Verse 17. *spoilers* : "raiders" (Moffatt). The raiding bands went in three directions—to Ophrah, which is north of Michmash; to Beth-Horon, which is north-west; and to Zeboim, which is south-east.

Chapter xiv. 3. *carrying an ephod*. The ephod here is an image used in divination, not a garment. So at least some scholars think.

Verse 4. Between Michmash (where the Philistines were) and Geba (where Saul was) lies a ravine in which are two rocks jutting out, as the passage says.

Verse 15. *a trembling*: i.e. a panic seized the Philistines (cf. Judges 7). The verse describes how the panic spread from one body to another. The panic was increased by an earthquake.

Verse 19. *withdraw thine hand*. "Take your hand off" (Moffatt), i.e. the crisis was so acute that there was no time to wait for an oracle.

Verse 25. *there was honey*, etc. What are called in Scotland "Foggie Toddlers" make and store their honey underground and in holes.

Verse 32. *eat with blood*. All through their history this was a prohibition. But the blood could only be poured out by the side of an altar. Hence Saul's action in creating one in the field.

Verse 41. *Give a perfect lot*: R.V. "Show the right."

Verse 43. *And, lo, I must die*: rather "Here I am. I am ready to die" (Moffatt).

Chapter xv. 3. Amalek was to be "devoted" to God. All living creatures were to be killed and all property to be confiscated to God (see Josh. 6 and 7).

Verse 5. *city of Amalek*: i.e. a tribal headquarters.

Verse 6. *the Kenites* (see Gen. 15¹⁹ and Judges 1¹⁶).

Verse 11. *it grieved Samuel*: rather "Samuel was wroth with Jehovah."

Verse 12. *Carmel*: not the well-known Carmel on the coast, but one south of Hebron.

place: rather "trophy," i.e. of his victory.

Verse 32. *delicately*: R.V. marg. "cheerfully." But Moffatt translates "Agag came to him with tottering steps. 'Death is a bitter thing,' said Agag."

Verse 33. *before the Lord*: i.e. at the sanctuary.

C. The Lesson

1. Recall the brilliant promise of Saul's beginnings, his good qualities, his courage and resource. Well, he was king and had a hard task set to him. Describe the condition of Israel, the oppression of the people, their unarmed state, their despair (see 13^{6,7} and 19⁻²³). Here was a task for God's servant!

2. *How Saul Performed it.* This campaign against the Philistines was his great achievement. The incidents are: (1) Jonathan's exploit (13³). (2) The gathering of the Philistines in force on the rumour that the "slaves had revolted." Their formidable power, their raids over the country (13¹⁷). (3) Jonathan's brave deed (14^{4 ff.}). (4) The remarkable sequel, the panic among the Philistines, the rapid growth of Saul's army, his triumphant march (14).

3. But there was something wrong about Saul all this time. His disobedience to God's will declared through Samuel (it *was* God's will to *him*). The two incidents (Gilgal and Amalek). Saul's life like a day which begins in sunshine and clouds over in the afternoon. The cloud was his self-will, vanity and ambition. Saul forgot he was God's servant. He forgot that promotion means service. And so God could not use him.

4. How men throw away the opportunity of great service by some self-will or disloyalty, e.g. Wolsey (ambition), Macbeth (the same), Judas (greed), Esau (the flesh).

5. Only by loyalty to conscience and duty can we get the guidance and blessing of God, *and be used by God* to do things. Read Tennyson's great ode on the

death of the Duke of Wellington. There is a fine story told of the son of the famous Sir Henry Havelock. Havelock told the boy once to wait for him at London Bridge one day. In the press of his engagements he forgot all about his promise. In the evening when he got home his wife asked him where the boy was, and her husband confessed he had forgotten him. When Havelock got to London Bridge, there was Harry waiting for him ! This boy afterwards became a notable soldier, won the Victoria Cross, and was held in high honour. This he owed to his habit of obedience to orders.

6. Let the class commit to memory Samuel's great words in which the lesson of Saul's life is embodied (1 Sam. 15^{22, 23}).

XXXVII. DAVID
FIGHTING GIANTS
1 SAMUEL 16¹⁻¹³ and 17
Date 1010 B.C.

A. For the Teacher

1. With David we reach the greatest period in the history of Israel. It was the Elizabethan period of Israel, when the territory and power of the nation were at their greatest. This was largely due to David, the greatest king and military leader Israel ever had. The story of his life is told with wonderful vividness and possesses undying interest for children. David did three things that entitle him to be called great : (1) He subdued all external enemies and unified the nation,

extending its boundaries north and south. (2) He stands at the fountain-head of sacred song in Israel. However many or few of our psalms he composed he was called "the sweet singer of Israel," and it is not unfitting that the Psalter should be called "The Psalms of David," just as Proverbs is called the "Proverbs of Solomon," though Solomon may have composed few of them. (3) And, finally, David so impressed himself on the thought and love of his people that he stood ever after as the type of the Messianic King, the ideal leader of God's people.

2. The story at this point has difficulties. The most obvious is that in chapter 17⁵⁵⁻⁵⁸ David is introduced to Saul for the first time, whereas in the previous chapter (16²¹), David is already at the court and well known to Saul. There are other discrepancies, but these are all due to the fact that we have two narratives of different date of the same events. But, as Professor McFadyen remarks, "it is the business of the critic and the historian to ascertain the facts; it is the business of the teacher and preacher to discover the great religious ideas by which the story is inspired." The passages given above tell a straightforward story with the real "religious ideas" in it.

3. The scene of the encounter is the Shephelah, a series of low foot-hills running down from the plateau of Judea to the sea plain and cut at various points by "wadies," i.e. valleys, which are the scene in winter of raging torrents, but in summer contain only a "brook" of water. On the one slope of one of these valleys the Philistines were posted, with the Israelites on the other. Goliath paraded up and down on the flat plain between the hills.

B. Notes

Chapter xvii. 1. The site of the battle was quite near the Philistine border.

Verse 4. *Six cubits and a span* : about $9\frac{1}{2}$ feet. The original inhabitants of the land seem to have been a race of great height.

Verse 5. *five thousand shekels* : about $1\frac{1}{2}$ cwts., therefore six hundred shekels (?) are about 20 lbs.

Verse 29. "What have I done now? I merely asked a question" (Moffatt) gives good sense.

Verse 34. *lion*. The Syrian lion was much smaller than the African. Samson also killed one.

Verse 35. "I would be after him, I would strike him" (Moffatt). It is the descriptive imperfect.

Verse 40. *scrip* : a rare word for bag.

Verse 52. *Shaaraim* : better "the two gates," i.e. the place where the roads to Ekron and Gath parted (Glazebrook).

C. The Lesson

1. Saul's rejection meant that another king must be chosen. And God chose in his place one of the greatest men in the whole of the history of the Jews. Story of David's anointing.

2. *David's first great deed*, the slaying of the giant.

(1) The scene of the encounter (see under *A*). (2) One feature of many ancient battles was the individual combats of the respective champions which often decided the issue. Cf. the fight between Bruce and the English knight at Bannockburn. (3) The description of the champions. Goliath's magnificent armour, his brazen helmet, his corselet of scales, his leg-greaves,

his javelin and spear and sword. David's sling and stones. (4) Notice David rejected armour he could not wear. He went in his own fitness, not another's. But he went in a fitness far greater, that of complete trust in God. He looked to God and exercised his own skill, a very fine example of "Trust in God and keep your powder dry," and of the way God uses the smallest we can offer.

3. The lesson is very obvious here, but none the less necessary. The children will supply all the application needed. (1) We have all a far harder fight in life than even this battle with Goliath, and far bigger and stronger giants to conquer. (2) What are these—the really difficult things to fight? Temper, e.g., Intemperance, Poverty. We are here to fight them. (3) How many times this fight has been fought successfully. Wilberforce against slavery. Florence Nightingale and disease in the Crimea. Lord Shaftesbury and the Children's Charter. Carey and Heathenism. (4) The secrets of victory are here. "Trust in the *living* God" and the habit of victory in smaller things. David had *practised* often with his sling before he used it on Goliath.

4. This is an incident children love to *act*. There may be four "scenes": (1) David in the camp, Goliath parading about; (2) David's interview with Saul; (3) The fight (with the actual words spoken); (4) The people shouting, "Saul has slain his thousands," etc.

XXXVIII. SAUL AND DAVID JEALOUSY

1 SAMUEL 16¹⁴⁻²³, 18⁵⁻¹⁶, 19⁹⁻¹⁸, 20²⁴⁻³⁴

A. For the Teacher

1. It is pretty clear that what we have at this point of the history is not a connected narrative but a collection of popular stories about David. It is better to treat the history this way in teaching, illustrating Saul's jealous attitude to David, then David as an outlaw, and then his accession to the throne, where we get on to firmer ground.

2. The "evil spirit from the Lord" which troubled Saul is called by various writers "a form of recurrent mania," a "nervous disorder," and "madness." It really began with "swelled head" and jealousy; and this horrid spirit, festering gradually with David's success and popularity into something morbid, became a form of madness. It was certainly an "evil spirit," but we may doubt whether it was "from the Lord." The Semitic mind attributed everything directly to God ("Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" Amos 3⁶), and this spirit of jealousy is regarded as a judgment because of what it brought upon Saul. We speak and think differently of evil, not attributing it directly to God but to the will of the sinner. It is an instance of the imperfect stage at which the writer had arrived that he could think of God as the author of sin.

3. There are plenty of illustrative instances of this

evil spirit (which was a poisonous ambition) in literature and story. The best of all is Longfellow's *King Robert of Sicily*, which teaches *exactly* the lesson of Saul's life. But the teacher must not only exhibit the vice. He must show the virtue which shames such a vice, i.e. magnanimity. Examples of this are John the Baptist ("He must increase but I must decrease"), Abraham and Lot, and (a very beautiful instance) the treatment of Havelock by Outram when Havelock was prosecuting his great march to Lucknow. Sir James Outram was sent out to supersede him, but when he discovered what great things Havelock had done he refused to take away from his glory and insisted on serving under Havelock.

B. Notes

Chapter xvi. 16. *cunning player*. An interesting parallel is King Philip V of Spain, cured of melancholy by the musician Farnielli (Glazebrook).

Verse 21. *armourbearer*. The relation between Saul and David was that of a squire to a knight in mediæval times or a batman to his officer during the war.

Chapter xviii. 23. *a poor man*, and therefore unable to pay the sum necessary for a wife, a remnant of the old custom of buying a wife.

Chapter xix. 13. *an image*: R.V. "teraphim." This was the household god. Cf. Genesis 31^{19, 30}.

Chapter xx. 24. *the new moon*: a festival held by all the Semitic peoples, of whom the Jews were a branch. It was a universal holiday.

Verse 26. *clean* : i.e. ceremonially.

Verse 34. *did eat no meat*, etc. : i.e. did not appear at his father's court.

C. The Lesson

1. Saul had been raised to power but he was not worthy to go on reigning because (1) he had forgotten God and (2) he had forgotten that he himself was only God's instrument. In other words he thought only of himself. Now when a person who is taken up with his own interests and glory sees another person rising to popularity and being honoured above himself, what is the sin that rises in his heart? Jealousy. We are to see how this evil spirit grew in Saul's heart till it made him insane.

2. The successive events: (1) It began with the song of the women (18⁷). (2) It grew with David's popularity (18¹⁶). (3) Saul appointed David to a military post so that he might not have to endure the sight of him (18¹⁸). (4) The marriage to Michal was a plot to have him killed (18¹⁹ ff.). (5) Saul tried to get Jonathan to kill David. (6) Saul tried to kill David himself repeatedly, and David only escaped by "the skin of his teeth" (e.g. 19⁹ ff.).

3. This hateful sin, jealousy, is directly due to self-seeking. The selfish man cannot endure seeing anyone honoured or successful in place of himself, and this grudging spirit grows and grows till it becomes a poison and eats out all the good in a soul and destroys all his happiness. A terrible instance is the Roman Emperor Caracalla, who would not endure having his brother Geta to share his throne and stabbed him in his mother's arms. So insane was his jealousy that he killed 20,000 people who had supported Geta. Nothing will so easily make a person insane.

4. But it is not enough to see the evil of this. It is far better to have a spirit that will not only make jealousy impossible but will give us a really noble character. That spirit is generosity. (Magnanimity is the right word, but it is difficult.) The best example of this is John the Baptist. Dwell on his splendid generosity as he saw his own disciples leaving him and going over to Jesus. Also Abraham giving up his right to choose the best territory and letting Lot choose. Also the noble conduct of Outram. How many opportunities there are for this in school (in games and in competition for prizes).

5. A striking parallel can be drawn between Saul and Shakespeare's Macbeth, both in their insane ambition and in their tragic fate.

XXXIX. JONATHAN AND DAVID FRIENDSHIP

1 SAMUEL 14¹⁻¹⁸, 18¹⁻²¹, 19¹⁻⁷, 20^{1-23, 35-42}, 23¹⁴⁻¹⁸;
2 SAMUEL 1¹⁷⁻²⁷

A. For the Teacher

The relations of Jonathan and David follow naturally as a vivid contrast with those of Saul and David. Jonathan's character is the opposite of Saul's. David's popularity and ability arouse in Jonathan only admiration and love, and he exhibits in his attitude to David that magnanimity which is the greatest quality in human life. The story of their friendship, the most famous of all such stories, has to be pieced together from scattered notices, but it gives the teacher a great oppor-

tunity of bringing out the value of friendship and the qualities of a true friend. The opportunity is especially valuable with a class of adolescents.

B. There are no special difficulties in the narrative to be explained.

C. The Lesson

1. What is the greatest blessing in life? A true friend. Why? Because friendship means love, and love always means happiness. It also means trust, and a friend is one whom you can depend on always, not only when things go right but when they go wrong.

2. Well, here is the story of the most famous friendship in the world, and you can see in it what a friend is, what it is to have a friend and to be a friend. (1) How it began (18¹⁻⁴). They "took to each other" at once. It was love at first sight. How beautifully that is expressed in the narrative. (2) Jonathan at once began to help David. He shielded him from Saul's anger. He stood by David even to the danger of his own life. (3) He gave up everything he could to David, even his own chance of the throne. He never thought of himself at all. (4) The two friends made a "covenant" together. They agreed to stand by each other, to be true to each other always. (5) When David was being pursued by Saul and his life was in danger Jonathan visited him and "strengthened his hands in God." A friend in need is a friend indeed. (6) When Jonathan was killed David was heart-broken. He paid a beautiful tribute to the character and love of his friend (2 Sam. 1).

3. Jonathan was a worthy friend in two ways. One

is because of his beautiful character. He is one of the noblest characters in the Bible—courageous, truthful, generous, great-hearted (cf. the character of Great-heart in Bunyan). What a boon and happiness for David to have such a friend! The other reason was his great love. Love is always generous. It always forgets itself. It is always extravagant and unselfish. Jonathan was heir to the throne, but he would rather see David king than be king himself. What a picture to look upon! We see the beauty of friendship chiefly in Jonathan because David had little opportunity of doing anything for Jonathan. Jonathan was the giver in the friendship and he gave with both hands.

4. There are other examples of friendship that are famous: Damon and Pythias, Orestes and Pylades. But none so wonderful as this. Such friendships give something great to friends. One is *influence*. What is good in one friend becomes the possession of the other. They give *themselves*; they cannot help it. That is why a worthy friend is such a blessing, and why a bad friend is such a curse. Then another thing is *happiness*. There is no happiness like that of loving and being loved by some one. And finally there is *help in need*. For you can always rely on a friend when things are at their worst.

5. Remember, however, that friendship is two-sided. If you are to *have* a friend you must *be* a friend. Friendship is not only a blessing. It is an opportunity, an opportunity for love to show what it is ready to do, an opportunity for unselfish service to another.

6. Jonathan may be compared with Bunyan's Great-heart. But Tennyson's Sir Galahad is as good a

parallel. Perhaps still better is Shakespeare's picture of Horatio in *Hamlet*, who was to Hamlet what Jonathan was to David and with many of Jonathan's finest qualities. In *Tom Brown's Schooldays* there is a good instance of the uplifting power of friendship in the influence of Arthur over Tom.

XL. DAVID THE OUTLAW

WAITING

1 SAMUEL 21-27

A. For the Teacher

1. This section of the history consists of a series of romantic tales of David's life in exile. One of the favourite stories was that in which David spares Saul's life. We have it in two versions, in chapters 24 and 26. David was an outlaw, and the best parallels to his life at this time are the stories of Robin Hood and William Wallace. The Scottish Covenanters furnish many similar experiences. The kind of broken men who joined him at Adullam were like the recruits who joined the Pretender on his invasion of England in the '45 (see Scott's *Waverley*, ch. 57). David Livingstone tells a story about his great-grandfather feigning madness like David, and successfully evading an unjust sentence in this way (Blaikie's *Life of Livingstone*, p. 9). The extraordinary mixture of good and bad in David's conduct at this time, his generosity, his savagery, his treachery, Canon Glazebrook points out, can be matched in many of the figures of the Middle Ages. Robin Hood could be as savage, and also as chivalrous, as

David. We must remember that David was a man of his time.

2. The country of David's wanderings was suitable for his purposes. The places mentioned are either in the fertile land round Hebron or in the rocky fastnesses sloping from it down to the Dead Sea. This latter region gave him good shelter (Engedi is just to the west of the Dead Sea) and the fertile tract gave him support (Glazebrook).

B. Notes

Chapter xxi. 1. *Nob* : about a mile north-east of Jerusalem.

Ahimelech : great-grandson of Eli.

Verse 7. *detained before the Lord*, until he had been declared free of some ceremonial sin.

Verse 9. *ephod* : clearly an image here.

Verse 13. *scrabbled* : scrawled.

Chapter xxii. 1. *cave of Adullam* : rather "strong-hold." Adullam was north-west of Hebron and south-west of Bethlehem.

Verse 3. Moab was a good refuge because it was at enmity with Israel.

Chapter xxiii. 1. *Keilah* : 3 miles south of Adullam.

Verse 14. *Ziph* : between the hill country of Judah and the Dead Sea, south of Hebron.

Verse 24. *wilderness of Maon* : part of "the wilderness of Judah" which lies along the west of the Dead Sea.

Chapter xxv. 18. *bottles* : skins.

measure : a third of an ephah ; an ephah contained $8\frac{1}{4}$ gallons.

Verse 31. *grief . . . nor offence of heart* ; rather " qualm of conscience nor ground of remorse."

Chapter xxvi. 1. *Hachilah* : 6 miles east of Ziph.

Verses 6, 7. A kind of laager. In an Arab encampment the spear stuck in the ground marked the chief's quarters.

Zeruiah : the three sons of Zeruiah, Joab, Abishai and Asahel, were young men about David's age (Glazebrook).

Verse 19. There might be two reasons for Saul's enmity : either Jehovah had stirred him up against David, in which case a propitiatory offering might appease Him ; or evil-minded men might have done so.

they have driven me out . . . saying, Go, serve other gods. At this time each land had its own god and you could only worship the god in his own land, so when Naaman wanted to worship Jehovah in his own country he had to take some of the soil of Israel and stand on it (2 Kings 5¹⁷⁻¹⁸). David shared this belief of his time.

C. *The Lesson*

1. An introduction for an English class would be a rapid narrative of Robin Hood's career, for a Scottish class of that of William Wallace, or some of the exciting adventures of the Covenanters when hunted by Claverhouse's dragoons.

2. Here in David's life is an exact parallel to this. (1) With Achish at Gath. Feigning madness. Why ? Because in the East they regard a lunatic as possessed by God and therefore sacred. (2) Adullam, the refuge for all the disreputable and discontented. Here David gathered 400 men. (3) An exploit at Keilah. His force grown to 600. (4) In the wilderness of Ziph, where he was safer than in a walled town. (5) Then

in the wilderness of Maon. A narrow escape ! (23²⁴⁻²⁸). (6) At Engedi, among the precipitous cliffs and many caverns of the rock region west of the Dead Sea. Here occurred the incident of his sparing Saul (the latter story is in chapter 26). (7) The episode of Nabal (25). (8) Again with Achish, settled in a town of his own at Ziklag. David does not appear to advantage here (27), and is forced by the distrust of the Philistine lords to leave the army of Achish on the eve of the battle with Saul.

3. There is one thing that is stamped on all this story. David knew how to wait. God had chosen him to be king, but this event seemed far off. David waited God's time, and while he waited he learned two things which were to be very useful to him later. First, he learned to rule men. It must have been very difficult to keep the unruly mob at Adullam in order and to secure discipline. He learned to do that, and that was a good preparation for being king. And he learned also to be a soldier, and afterwards he became one of the greatest soldiers in Hebrew history. And so this time of waiting was not wasted.

4. Now it is difficult to wait for what we want. We are apt to be discontented, especially if what we want is our due. And we are apt to waste the present opportunity in bitterness and complaints and so learn nothing from it. The famous scholar, Dr. Dods, when he became a minister could find no congregation to elect him for seven years. But he used these seven years of waiting so faithfully that he made himself a sound scholar and this fitted him for a professor's chair to which he was called.

XLI. DAVID'S LAMENT

THE GOOD IN MEN

1 SAMUEL 28, 31, and 2 SAMUEL 1

A. For the Teacher

1. The object of this lesson is simply to make David's famous dirge intelligible. The children should be taught to get it by heart. But to make learning by heart a profit and pleasure the memory work must be understood. The defect of memory work in schools is that it is often only learning by rote and not intelligently. Hence the history here is only the background of the poem.

2. This dirge is the second oldest poem in the O.T. (Deborah's Song is the oldest). It is, of course, poetry. Hebrew poetry has two characteristics. It has rhythm but no rhyme or metre. Rhythm is a musical flow of words with a recurrent stress or accent. It is also generally in couplets of which the second is either in antithesis to the first or a confirmation of it. An example of the first is Proverbs 1⁷, of the second Proverbs 1⁸. Both these characteristics are to be seen in this great poem. Notice too its simplicity and directness.

3. The episode of the witch of Endor is important as showing that Saul was in a condition of utter despondency. Coleridge, in his *Table Talk*, holds that the whole thing was trickery, that the woman was a dishonest "medium" and a ventriloquist. Note in favour of this that Saul did not see Samuel—only the woman did ; and that the ghost of Samuel only repeated a prediction which the real Samuel had already made.

B. Notes

Chapter xxviii. 3. *those that had familiar spirits.* Moffatt translates “mediums.”

Verse 6. The three ways in which God revealed His will. Dreams were the earliest way. Urim (a species of lot) was used chiefly at this period. Prophecy was a later and more spiritual means.

Verse 7. *Endor*: north of Shunem, 12 miles from Gilboa and *behind* the Philistine army.

Chapter xxxi. 4. *abuse me*: rather “mock me.” Saul was afraid of being treated like Samson.

sore afraid. Glazebrook finds a close parallel to this scene in *Antony and Cleopatra* (iv. 12), where Eros kills himself rather than slay his master Antony.

Verse 10. *house of Ashtaroth*: the great temple of Astarte (Venus) at Ashkelon.

Verses 11–13. See chapter 9 for an account of what Saul had done for them.

Verse 12. *wall of Bethshan*. The bodies of traitors were so exposed in early times in England.

2 Samuel i. 2–16. Miss Stoddart (*The Old Testament in Life and Literature*) cites a remarkable parallel to this tale. A man who boasted to Cetewayo, the African chief, that he had killed Cetewayo’s rival and brother, expecting reward, was put to death instead.

Verses 17 ff. The text is in parts not clear, but the beautiful language of our version may be left.

Verse 21. *nor fields of offerings.* There is no sense in this. The meaning is “may rain never visit you, ye fields of death.”

shield not anointed with oil: a shield was oiled to make the enemy's weapon slip. Here Saul's shield is lying exposed to the weather, and "not anointed with oil."

C. *The Lesson*

1. We are come to the end of Saul's tragic career. Sometimes a man is greater in his death than in his life. And we cannot help admiring the courage with which Saul faced the inevitable.

2. (1) The two armies were posted one on the south of the valley of Jezreel, on the slopes of Mount Gilboa, and the other (Philistines) on the slopes north of the valley at Shunem. (2) We know nothing of the details of the battle. But we know Saul was utterly despondent. This despair probably spread to his soldiers, which explains their defeat. They had lost their "morale." A despondent army is already beaten. (3) This is shown in Saul's visit to the witch of Endor, who was very likely a mere fraudulent "medium." Saul, however, was her dupe and was taken in. (4) The end is told in 1 Samuel 31 with simple and tragic directness.

3. David's beautiful dirge and the events that occasioned it show one thing: how much good there is in men when it comes to a real crisis. Look first at Saul, the courageous soldier going down with a brave face. Look at Jonathan, loyal to the death to the father he thought mistaken. Look at David, generous to the man who had tried persistently to take his life.

4. There is something here that helps us to believe in our fellowmen. We are apt to judge them hardly,

but when we get down beneath their faults we can find good. This was the way Jesus took with people, and because He believed in the good in men He found it, and brought it to the light. The truth about anybody is generally better than we would guess from what we see on the surface. And so we can repeat this dirge, believing its fine, generous tribute to be true to the facts.

XLII. THE TAKING OF JERUSALEM

2 SAMUEL 5 and 6

A. For the Teacher

1. The two events narrated in this lesson are of great importance in the history of Israel. The first is the capture of Jerusalem. David, like a good soldier, had an eye for strategic points. The position of Jerusalem made it nearly impregnable. It is situated on a hill which is about 2,400 feet above the sea. The hill is divided into two plateaux with a valley between. The eastern part was "the city of David." The capture was one of the great turning-points in the history of the nation. It gave the people a secure stronghold and a centre for their national life. Its history from this time, its place in the history of the world, show what a momentous step David took in securing it.

2. The other event is equally important, the bringing of the Ark to Jerusalem. This was the beginning of the long spiritual history of Jerusalem. Solomon's Temple was the necessary consequence of it. And then Nehemiah's Temple, and then Herod's. But the

immediate importance of this step lay in the fact that a religious centre was created for the people's worship. Nothing contributed to the unifying of the nation like this, since religion was the main interest of this people. How influential this step of David's was is seen from the action of Jeroboam when he separated from Judah. He saw that the separation could not last unless he could provide a new religious centre in the north. Hence the setting up of golden calves. From these two events we can see the greatness of David both as a ruler and as a statesman.

3. The episode of Uzzah's death is another instance of the imperfect ideas of God which still prevailed. Whatever the cause of his sudden death may have been (and a dozen reasonable explanations can be offered) we can hardly accept the writer's interpretation of it as a judgment of God. Nor need we. He could not *know* it was an act of God. That was his view of it. This view was natural in his time. It is incredible to us simply because Christ has taught us what this ancient writer did not know about God. Revelation was given gradually as God's people were able to receive it. We are looking here at an early stage of it.

B. Notes

Chapter v. 6. The text is not clear. Probably Moffatt's translation represents the sense: "They told David, You will never get in here, blind men and cripples could drive you off!"

Verse 7. *Zion*: the easterly branch of the hill on which Jerusalem was later built.

Verse 9. *Millo*: a fort or rampart of the stronghold.

Verse 18. *valley of Rephaim*: west of Jerusalem.

Chapter vi. 5. Moffatt gives the instruments used as lutes, lyres, drums, rattles, and cymbals.

Verse 10. *the Gittite*: i.e. of Gath. He was probably a "naturalized" Philistine.

Verse 14. *a linen ephod*: a kind of kilt.

Verse 16. *she despised him*. The reason was that in Eastern countries those who danced did so either as a spectacle or under great excitement. Michal thought David was "making a fool of himself" in a way unworthy of a king.

Verse 17. Note that at this time a layman could offer sacrifice.

Verse 19. It was common for worshippers to partake of part of the animal they had offered in sacrifice.

C. The Lesson

This lesson is purely historical. Its aim is to explain the importance of the two events which gave David a secure stronghold and a religious capital.

1. The events between Saul's death and the taking of Jerusalem. David at once became King of Judah. But Abner for a time bolstered up a separate kingdom for Saul's son. Its strength depended on Abner, however, and at his death the sheiks of the northern tribes came to David to make an agreement with him. David then became king of all Israel.

2. The first thing David did when he was thus established was to secure a stronghold which would be a basis of operations and a safe refuge. He saw that Jerusalem was just what he wanted and proceeded to attack it. The Jebusites who held it were so sure of

its strength that they taunted David and said the blind and the lame would keep him out. But strong as it was it fell before David's assault. This was one of the most important events in the whole history of Israel because it gave Israel a central rallying-point and a nearly impregnable fortress. Jerusalem is one of the great cities of the world, and its long and glorious history began when David captured it.

3. But one thing had to be done to give the new capital its proper place in the national life. It must have the Ark of God in it, for the people believed this Ark to be the sign and assurance of God's presence. The Ark had been for long at Kirjath-jearim and David resolved to bring it to his city, which would then be the centre of the people's religious as well as of their civil life. But a tragic incident prevented him from effecting his purpose for a time. Story of Uzzah. Uzzah's death was naturally, but wrongly, attributed to a judgment of God. And so the Ark was left in the house of a man called Obed-Edom, until it became clear that all danger was over from handling it. Then with great solemnity and rejoicing it was brought to Jerusalem. This was the beginning of the story of Jerusalem as a holy city. Here was the Ark, here the Temple was built, and here the worship of the people was more and more centred. And thus the love and devotion of the people more and more were directed to this city which was the symbol of all they held great and dear.

XLIII. ABSALOM'S REBELLION
TREACHERY
2 SAMUEL 15-18

A. For the Teacher

1. Note the extraordinary vividness of this narrative. The characters are presented so that you see them acting and even thinking. Ittai, Ahitophel, Hushai, Joab, the young messengers, the competing runners; above all, David and Absalom. The unfavourable picture of David here shows, if that were needed, how early the narrative is. Later, no one would have dared to depict the national hero like this. His conduct awakens "a mixture of pity and contempt." Absalom is as frankly shown, the spoilt boy developing into the weak, selfish, and unscrupulous man. It is one of the most wonderful stories in the Bible. But then we say that about so many Bible stories!

2. The chief feature of the narrative is the contrast between faithfulness and treachery. The faithful are Joab, fierce, cruel but forthright and intensely loyal to David; Ittai, the mercenary who would not desert his master; Hushai, the wise counsellor, and many others. The treacherous are Absalom, Ahitophel, Ziba. The crisis brought out the real men as it always does.

3. One point is interesting, David's attitude to the Ark. He would not take it with him, and for a remarkable reason. If God was for him He would save him without the Ark; if not, the Ark would make no difference. This is a very significant incident. It shows that David had reached a more spiritual under-

standing than his people. It was one of those religious landmarks which show how, under God's teaching, Israel was growing in spiritual knowledge and insight.

B. Notes

Chapter xv. 1. A mark of royalty.

Verse 6. *stole the hearts of the people* : cf. Richard II, i. 4.

Verse 10. *spies* : rather, messengers.

Verse 12. *Giloh* : a village 6 miles north-west of Hebron.
sacrifices : a necessary part of the coronation.

Verse 14. *servants* : officers of the court.

Verse 18. *all the Gittites* : rather, "the men of Ittai the Gittite."

Verse 25. *Carry back the ark*. (See under *A.*) This is the end of the wanderings of the Ark. It was never again carried into battle.

Verse 28. *in the plain of the wilderness* : R.V. has "at the fords of the wilderness," i.e. the fords across Jordan.

Chapter xvi. 8. If Shimei refers to the dreadful incident in chapter 21, that chapter would seem to be out of its place.

Verse 15. "*Men of Israel*" in the story always refers to Absalom's followers.

Chapter xvii. 17. *Enrogel* : near Jerusalem.

Verse 20. *water* : the Jordan.

Verse 24. *Mahanaim* : on the east of the Jordan just north of the Jabbok.

Chapter xviii. 6. *the wood of Ephraim* : R.V. has "forest," but it is not a forest in the ordinary sense. It was a broken, rocky country, and many died in this inhospitable waste where they were lost (see verse 8).

Verse 17. *a very great heap of stones.* “This way of insulting a dead foe is still practised in the East. Achan was treated in this way and the king of Ai (Josh. 8²⁹)” (Glazebrook).

Verse 21. *Cushi* : R.V. “the cushite,” i.e. an Ethiopian, probably a negro slave.

Verse 23. *by the way of the plain* : i.e. of Jordan, and so an easier, though longer, way than through the “forest” of Ephraim.

Chapter xix. 5. *thou hast shamed.* Joab’s rough words were wise, as David’s grief was disheartening to his supporters. But David cherished a bitter memory of these words.

Verse 8. *sat in the gate* : the “gate” of an Eastern city was like the Greek “agora” and the Roman Forum. It was a large space where business was done and where the public life of the city was conducted.

C. *The Lesson*

1. When David was settled down and victorious over his external enemies the one great danger was treachery from within. And the danger was greatest if the treachery came from one who was completely trusted, and greatest of all if it came from within his own family. We see David passing through such an experience from the conduct of his own son Absalom.

2. Absalom had been treated by David with consistent kindness. Indeed he had been spoilt. And a spoilt or “coddled” child generally turns out badly. We are made strong by discipline, by difficulties, by hardness. We are made weak and selfish and cruel by getting everything made easy for us. And Absalom had in this way been made into a weak, selfish and

cruel man. He had killed his own half-brother and been forgiven the crime. David had treated him with generosity and kindness, and Absalom in return plotted to kill his father and seize his throne.

3. The scenes in the story: (1) Absalom's horrid hypocrisy and treachery. (2) David's flight. The loyalty of Ittai. (3) Shimei and Ziba. (4) Hushai and Ahitophel. (5) Help from the sheiks beyond Jordan (17²⁷⁻²⁹). (6) The battle; Absalom's death. (7) David's grief.

4. Absalom was that worst of all bad men, a traitor. His sin was not weakness or selfishness or cruelty only, but treachery. This has always been regarded as the worst of all wicked things. Dante in his great poem the *Inferno* puts the traitors at the very lowest depth of hell, furthest away from God. This sin is bad because it means betraying one who trusts you. That means ingratitude and it means untruthfulness. It is just rottenness in a life. The worst thing you can say of anyone is that you cannot trust him. We find many parallels to Absalom's act. The story of King Arthur and Mordred his son is one. Cassius and Caesar is another. The worst of all is Judas, the betrayer of Christ.

5. On the other hand, you have here some splendid examples of loyalty. Ittai was a foreigner and served David for hire, yet in the time of David's need, when things looked very black, he stood by David. So did Joab. In spite of his fierce, hard nature, he was loyal. What a splendid example of loyalty to God we find in Job! The Jacobites were splendidly loyal to their King. This is the greatest of virtues, loyalty to man or to God, to a master or a friend, to anyone who trusts us.

XLIV. DAVID'S END

THE SECRET OF GREAT LIVES

1 KINGS 2¹⁻¹¹*A. For the Teacher*

1. The picture of David's last days in 1 Kings is a dark one. We see the old monarch in his dotage, giving wicked counsel to Solomon to put to death David's old and faithful follower, Joab, and also Shimei, whom he had promised to spare. And we see intrigues going on for possession of the throne, one of them being successful in making Solomon king. But we must not let all this blind us to the real greatness of David or the splendour of the reign that was coming to a close. And it is important for the pupil to realize, as he goes on reading the Old Testament story, what was actually happening, and how one era was passing into another, and what the significance of it all was. So we review David's reign.

2. *David's Achievements.* (1) The first of David's achievements was his complete conquest of all the enemies of Israel. He subdued Edom and Moab and Ammon. But his greatest work was the subjugation of the Philistines, who were never afterwards a menace. But David not only defeated these enemies. He extended the territory of Israel in all directions from north to south and east to west, so that the kingdom of Israel was greater, more extensive, more powerful and wealthy than at any other part of its history. That was the special bequest he left to Solomon. (2) Notice the change that came over Israel with this new

power and wealth. At first she was a pastoral tribe, then after the settlement in Palestine she became an agricultural people with corresponding changes in her character and life. Now she began to be a commercial nation, trading far and near, and acquiring many new things and ideas, to which reference will be made later. (3) David gave to the kingdom a central stronghold for its civil and religious life and thus determined the whole future history of the nation and the world (see Lesson XLII). (4) With David we begin to see culture coming into the nation's life. His name is definitely associated with the Psalter, and, however few or many of the psalms were written by him (and no one can tell the real truth of this), the tradition which makes David the source of the national poetry is persistent and ancient (1 Chron. 15¹⁶⁻²⁵, 16⁴⁻⁷; Ezra 3¹⁰; Neh. 12³⁶), and may well be true. Two facts confirm it. One is that he was a skilful musician, and ancient bards sang their own compositions. The other is the lament over Saul and Jonathan. David composed that lovely dirge, and he who composed that may well have composed any of our psalms.

3. His Character. So much for what he did. What manner of man was he who did all this? In later ages his character was idealized, and he became the national hero, so much so that the Messiah was expected to be a Davidic personality. But this great place would never have been given to him in the national belief if he had not had something in him that was great. What? Well, notice the devotion of men to him. His followers risked their lives to get him a cup of cold water. Joab, for all his fierce temper, was David's loyal man. Ittai would not leave him though he was

a stranger. Jonathan gave up the throne for him. And so on. Then his chivalry: remember his conduct towards Saul; and how he poured out the water which his followers risked life to get. Then his loving heart: we see this in his lament over Saul, in his relations with Jonathan, in the way he attached people to him, for those who love much have much love given to them. Apart from these characteristics there are David's mental powers, which were much above those of others round him, and his military genius, and his power of command. And, most of all and above all, his deep and sincere piety.

Along with these great virtues we must recognize David's serious defects. He was on occasion cruel and violent. He deceived Achish shamefully when Achish generously trusted him. His sin against Uriah was vile even in an age of vile deeds. His dying counsels to Solomon were horrible, though we have to remember he was not himself. It is a fine testimony to the truth of the Bible that all this is ruthlessly exposed. And we have to keep in mind that a good deal of David's wickedness was not wickedness at all to the men of his time. His lies and deceits were evidence of cleverness. And so we have to judge David by the standards of his own age and not those of ours.

4. What then we see in David is a mixture of good and bad. The bad is largely due to his time. The good (and this is the great lesson of his life) is largely due to his religion. David's religious faith was the deepest and truest thing in his life. He acknowledges God in everything. He attributes all his success to the Divine blessing. His dearest wish is to build a House for God's worship. When he sinned his penitence

before God was deep and sincere. In all his difficulties his trust was in God (2 Sam. 6²¹, 24¹⁴, etc., etc.).

5. Now this is the secret of all great lives. Look at Abraham, Moses, Paul. What made them great, and enabled them to do their great work? Their faith in God. Look, outside the Bible, at men like Abraham Lincoln, who said he was often driven to his knees because all his own wisdom was not enough to guide him; at Livingstone, whose devotion to God's will in every detail converted Stanley to the Christian faith; at Sir Walter Scott, who died with the words of the Bible on his lips; at Pasteur, who died with one hand in his wife's and the other holding a crucifix; at Earl Haig, who, at the darkest moment of the war, repeated the words, "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." But these are only a few examples.

6. Now what is true of these men is true for us all. It is by simple faith in God that we become strong and receive guidance, and are helped to do good and are used to do real service to others. "Our sufficiency is of God."

XLV. SOLOMON

A NEW ERA

1 KINGS 4, 5, 7, 10

Date 970 B.C.

A. For the Teacher

It is essential that the older pupils should grasp the nature of the new epoch that came with Solomon.

Great changes took place in the life of the people at this time, with far-reaching results.

1. *Solomon's Great Dominion.* The Kingdom he inherited from David Solomon preserved, extended, and organized. Two results of this greatness are clear. One is that Israel developed into a mercantile people. They were in contact with many other nations, their interests broadened out, they found new wants when they saw new goods. Israel's territory lay on the great trade route between Egypt and the East, and Solomon took advantage of this to make his kingdom a sort of trade medium. But he did more. He built a navy which explored the Red Sea and brought back gold and all sorts of luxuries. "Ivory, apes and peacocks" are mentioned. All this meant a great change in the outlook of what had been a simple people.

2. Another result was a great increase of wealth, and with this, of luxury and splendour. Solomon became an Oriental prince, with all kinds of magnificence which are described in some measure in the chapters given above. He organized his kingdom into twelve divisions with officers over each, and each division furnished food (and probably money) for one month to the court. But this was not all. Solomon became a great builder. He built fortresses, and store cities, and a palace of great splendour for himself, and above all, the great Temple. He is said to have had a thousand wives. An Eastern monarch's dignity and power were seen in the size of his harem. And you can see how far we have travelled even from David's time by the size of Solomon's harem (for Solomon's magnificence read Song of Solomon 3⁷⁻¹¹ and Eccles. 2⁴⁻⁸). Now all

this was kept up by a system which included two bad things. One was the forced contributions referred to. This was opposed to the spirit of independence which had characterized the Hebrew people, and was sure to breed trouble. The other was much worse. Solomon employed forced labour for his building. There can be no doubt that these two things sowed the seeds of trouble which broke out after Solomon's death. But all this wealth and tyranny had other results. They turned a simple people into a people in whose life extremes of riches and poverty existed. And here we find the beginning of those social evils against which the prophets thundered later on.

3. A much more agreeable result that followed the expansion of the nation was the beginning of a great intellectual movement. You will notice that a big commercial development is often associated with a big literary development. This was so in Elizabethan England. It was so also in the greatest age of Athens. It was so in Israel. Contact with other nations brought to Israel wider thoughts. And especially it so broadened out their outlook that there arose a way of looking at life and its problems which was not Jewish but *human*, not in a narrow but in a *universal* way. This was what gave rise to the literature in the Old Testament called the "wisdom" literature. The earliest form it took was that of Proverbs. These wise sayings have two characteristics. They are practical, and they are human. They think of life not as a Jew's life but as a *man's*. This literature was produced by a class of men called the "wise men," who were really the philosophers of Israel. Just as we have preachers and scientists and philosophers, Israel had priests and prophets and "wise

men.” This intellectual movement began in Solomon’s time as a result of the great commercial growth of the nation. Later, the “wise men” tackled more difficult problems. And in Job and in some of the Psalms we find them discussing the problem of suffering and of the future life. It was a special line of intellectual development and it began in Solomon’s time. Solomon had been trained in the arts of peace, and his reign was one of peace and of literary culture. It is supposed that a good deal of the earlier history of Israel which we have in the Pentateuch and in the books of Samuel was composed at this period, at least the earlier narratives out of which the history was made.

XLVI. SOLOMON’S CHOICE THE GREATEST GOOD 1 KINGS 3

A. For the Teacher

1. The “wisdom” which Solomon chose was really shrewdness, the faculty of perceiving the real values in life. It enabled a man to see, e.g., the folly of sin. It helped him to see life as it really is. As time went on it became something even greater, the power to see truth amid the perplexities of life, to know why men suffer, to discover that an explanation of many things that puzzle us here is to be found in another life. Hence Job and many psalms are among the “wisdom” literature. But in Solomon’s time wisdom was simply a shrewd perception of real values.

2. The “High Place” where this incident took place

was Gibeon. A High Place was the flat top of some eminence where there was a sanctuary. Nearly all towns had one near at hand. There was an altar and a pillar, and the worship took place in the open. The worship consisted of prayer and sacrifice. These high places were the churches of the land, even after Solomon's Temple was built. The Temple was, in relation to them, what a cathedral is to parish churches. By and by the purer worship was concentrated at the Temple, while the High Places retained much of the old coarseness and superstition. Hence the attempt to abolish them which was in the end successful in the time of Josiah.

3. In teaching that Solomon chose wisdom instead of wealth, avoid speaking in an unreal way about worldly possessions, as if they were not good or worth having. The children know that they are, and that the teacher values them (money, pleasure, etc.) like other people. The point of the incident is that to Solomon wisdom was *first*.

B. Notes

Chapter iii. 7. *a little child*: a figure of speech. Solomon would be over twenty at the time. Josephus makes him fourteen.

Verse 9. *an understanding heart to . . . discern*: "a thoughtful mind for governing Thy people, that I may distinguish right and wrong" (Moffatt).

Verse 15. *behold, it was a dream*. The writer does not mean that it was all an illusion, but that the incident took place during a dream, which was a recognized way of Divine communication.

Verse 18. *no stranger*, and therefore no witness to what took place.

C. The Lesson

1. It is always fascinating to have a choice of things given to us ; so fascinating that we often imagine what we would choose if it were in our power. Look at children before a shop window !

2. Here is a lad who really had a great choice given him. He was beginning his reign. He was old enough to know that his job would be a very difficult one. He was young, and Israel was a great people and hard to manage. He had many enemies and a great responsibility. So, like a wise lad, he went to God at the church (the High Place) to pray. And there in his sleep God put the choice before him. And because he had been praying he saw clearly what he needed, viz. wisdom, ability to see clearly which way to take, which men to trust. He might have set his heart on wealth, or success in war, or long life. But not after praying to God. He needed ability to play his part and do his work faithfully and well. That is wisdom. When Queen Victoria was a little girl of twelve, her governess told her that she would one day be a queen. The girl was silent in thought for a few moments, and then, taking her governess's hand, she said, "I will be good." This was the same choice as Solomon's, but it was better kept.

3. Now that decision is not given to Solomon only. It is given to us. We *do* have this choice. And it is between the high and the low, between material things like money, fame, position on the one hand, and wisdom on the other, i.e. ability to play our part manfully and loyally. We *all* have to make this choice. Tell the story of the choice of Hercules, how in youth

two females met him (Virtue and Pleasure) and how he chose the former. The same story is told of Mohammed, who, standing on a hill above Damascus, turned from the enchanting view, saying, "Man has but one Paradise, and mine is fixed elsewhere." Moses made the same choice when he cast in his lot with his people instead of being a prince (see Lesson XIII). But above all Jesus made this choice at His Temptation (St. Matt. 4).

4. But this does not mean that we despise the good things of this world, like pleasure and money. These are God's gifts and it is foolish to think them evil. The good choice does not mean rejecting these things. It means putting the best thing *first* and these things second. We all reveal what we are by the thing we put first in our choice. We ought to choose the *best* and make it first. God's will, a good conscience, loyalty, truth, Christ—it may take any of these forms. And we may be sure that God will give to us what material possessions are good for us. We must make sure of the *best* and leave the rest to God. Remember then that you ought to make up your minds early, like Solomon, about this question: What am I going to make sure of as my *chief* object in life?

XLVII. THE TEMPLE

WHERE GOD DWELLS

1 KINGS 5-8

A. For the Teacher

1. To form a true idea of the first Temple we must remember it was only part of a "great architectural

scheme.” Solomon built a palace, a hall of justice and a hall of pillars, as well as a Temple. The Temple, at least at first, was more a king’s chapel than a national sanctuary, though more and more it gathered to itself the spiritual regard of the people and in the end became the centre of their national worship.

2. The Temple took seven years to build, but it was not a large edifice. A small cathedral is four or five times the size. It was only some 90 feet long by 30 feet broad, exclusive of the porch. The reason for this is that an ancient temple was not so much a place for the gathering of people for worship (like a Christian Church) as a shrine or abode of the Deity. Only priests really entered the Temple proper.

3. The Hebrews themselves had not the skill necessary for planning or erecting such a building, so they had to call in the aid of the more highly civilized Phœnicians. The architect of the Temple was probably the Hiram or Huram of 7¹³ ff., and the skilled artificers were Phœnicians. But the labour was provided by that forced levy from Israel and the Canaanites which created so much discontent (5¹³⁻¹⁸). To pay the foreign workmen Solomon sent a great quantity of wheat and oil from the corn lands of Northern Israel (5⁷⁻¹¹). The cedar-wood and fir-wood were sent by King Hiram on rafts to Joppa (2 Chron. 2¹⁶). The stone came from the hill country of Palestine. It was only because of the thousands of forced labourers that the great buildings of Solomon were made possible.

4. The beautiful account of the Dedication Service in chapter 8 is pronounced by scholars to be much later than the event, in fact after the time of Josiah, and the

glorious dedication prayer is regarded as a free composition of this later age. There is a good deal in the prayer to support this conclusion, but in the main the prayer is true to the purpose for which the Temple was erected. If it was to be a royal chapel it would be for just such occasions as Solomon mentions that it would be used. So we may say that substantially it reflects the actual situation.

B. Notes

Chapter v. 6. *Sidonians* : i.e. Phœnicians, whose chief cities were Tyre and Sidon.

Verse 9. *the place* : Joppa (see 2 Chronicles 2¹⁶).

Chapter vi. 2. A cubit is 18 inches.

Verse 3. The teacher must realize the meaning of words used in the narrative.

The “*house*” is the whole Temple, the “*temple*” is the Holy Place or nave, the “*oracle*” is the Shrine or Holy of Holies. So “the temple of the house” is the nave of the Temple.

Verse 4. *windows* : i.e. at the top of the wall. The side chambers came within 15 feet of the roof.

of fixed lattice work (R.V.) : i.e. to admit light and air and keep out birds.

Verse 8. *right side* : i.e. the south. The Hebrews faced the east when counting direction.

Verse 23. *cherubims* : human figures with animal faces.

Verse 31. *doors* are folding doors.

Verse 34. “The one door was composed of two folding leaves, and the other door, etc.” (Glazebrook).

Verse 36. *the inner court* : the Temple court, i.e. the court in which the Temple stood.

Chapter viii. 1. *elders of Israel*: leading men of each tribe.

Verse 2. *Ethanim*: i.e. Sept.-Oct.

Verse 10. *the cloud*, which symbolized the presence of Jehovah (Exod. 33⁹).

Verse 12. *thick darkness*. The Holy of Holies was quite dark. Baal-worshippers adored the sun.

Verse 22. *stood*: the attitude of prayer, but cf. verse ⁵⁴.

Verse 24. *promisedst*. 2 Samuel 7¹²⁻¹⁶.

Verses 31, 32. The ordeal by oath was common. The sinner would be compelled by fear of the result of false swearing to confess the truth.

Verse 51. *furnace of iron*, so hot as to melt iron, an image for very severe suffering.

Verse 64. *peace offerings* were the commonest. The fat was burned on the altar and the flesh eaten by the worshippers. In *burnt offerings* the whole victim was burnt. In *meal offerings* (of corn, etc.) part was burnt and the rest used for the feast (Glazebrook).

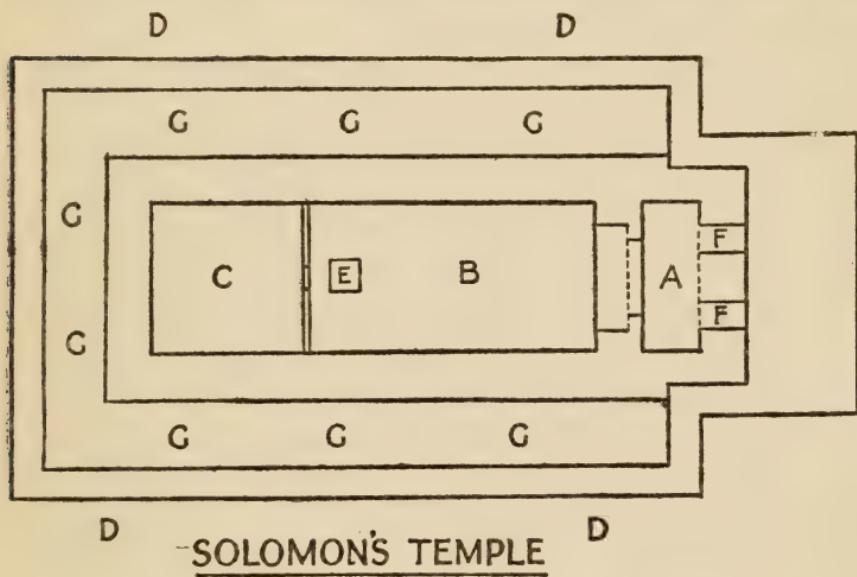
Verse 65. Northern and southern boundaries.

C. The Lesson

1. Every child has seen a church, and many have seen a great church such as a cathedral. There are famous churches, such as St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey and St. Peter's at Rome and Notre Dame. But the greatest and most famous of all churches in history was the Temple of Solomon. We are going to see how it was built, what it was like, how it was set apart for use, and what its meaning and purpose were.

2. *How it was Built*. Look at a plan of its shape.

It was a small building only 90 feet long. The porch (A) was 30 feet wide and 35 feet deep. The nave or Holy Place (B) was 60 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 45 feet high. In it was an altar for incense (E), a table for shewbread and ten lamps which burned night and day. It was lighted by windows set near the roof. The Shrine or Holy of Holies (C) was a perfect cube of 30 feet each way. It contained the Ark and the



Cherubim. These buildings were placed in a court (D) which measured 380 feet by 210 feet. In this court and before the porch were the altar of burnt offering, a basin of bronze, the movable "lavers" for washing, and two enormous bronze pillars (F) 25 feet high and 6 feet in diameter, called Jachin and Boaz. The Temple buildings were surrounded on all sides by a series of side chambers of three stories (G).

The materials for the building, the labour for it, the

time it took have all been mentioned under *A*, but should be a part of the lesson at this point.

3. *How it was Set Apart.* The great service in chapter 8 : (1) transference of the Ark ; (2) Solomon's address to the people ; (3) the great prayer. The various conditions and needs that would bring Israel to God's House in prayer are beautifully described—defeat, drought, plague, captivity, loneliness, sin. If possible this great prayer should be read aloud.

4. *Its Meaning.* Why was this Temple built ? Why is any church built ? The best answer is : to help us to realize that all places are sacred, that God is everywhere. Just as the purpose of the Sabbath was to teach us that all time belongs to God, so the Temple was to teach us that God is with us everywhere. We go to a church to worship that we may learn to have God with us always. Worship is not real if it is confined to one place, and religion is not real if it is confined to one day. The church exists to help us to practise the presence of God in daily life. That is why the very best should be given both in building and in ceremony. To acknowledge God no building is too splendid, and no service too beautiful.

5. But we must not forget that in the New Testament the true Temple of God is said to be the believing heart. The Temple of God is holy, “ which temple ye are.” The great end of religion is to have God in the heart. It is because churches help us to realize God that they are necessary. We may pray anywhere and find the wayside bush “ aflame with God.” But the church helps us to pray and the soul in need will ever find God in His own House.

XLVIII. THE DISRUPTION OF THE NATION INFLUENCE

1 KINGS 11²⁶⁻⁴³ and 12

Date 933 B.C.

A. For the Teacher

1. The "revolt" under Jeroboam was one of the most important crises in the history of the nation. Henceforth we have two kingdoms, "Judah" in the south, and "Israel," comprising roughly the ten tribes, in the north. This split was important historically for two reasons: (1) It weakened the nation, and prevented it becoming (as it might have been) a great eastern power. The tribes in the north were more wealthy, more civilized and more powerful. For some time the history is concerned mainly with the northern kingdom, and for two hundred years all the great prophets belonged to this region. Judah was smaller and far weaker, but Judah persisted long after Israel had disappeared because it possessed the Temple and a continuous dynasty and an impregnable position, as well as a simpler and purer faith. But the separation of these kingdoms left the nation weak. (2) The other result was as disastrous. The image worship established by Jeroboam opened the way for the sensuous Canaanite religion and this planted a seed of moral weakness in the northern kingdom which grew to something more and more evil.

2. The causes of the Disruption are fairly obvious. (1) One is to be found in geography. The land of Palestine is broken by barriers of climate and of physical

differences. Jerusalem was on a high and bare plateau and its climate and people differed greatly from those of the north. There had been this difference always. This made separation easier. (2) The immediate cause was the oppressive system of forced labour instituted by Solomon, and the heavy taxation demanded. Rehoboam refused any relief and, with a leader like Jeroboam, separation was inevitable. (3) Another cause was religious. Solomon had gone astray after foreign gods (11¹⁻⁸; 11³³), and it is clear the prophets were against him, and it was probably prophecy that was behind Jeroboam in his revolt (11²⁹⁻³⁹).

3. The whole story is told here from the standpoint of a much later and purer faith, and Jeroboam is roundly condemned. But if we judge him by the facts of his own time he is not so black as this. The separation was really justified politically. No freeman would stand what Rehoboam intended to impose. Also Jeroboam was not introducing religious innovation by his bull-worship. It seems to have been common enough. His fault was in continuing and establishing, for purely political and selfish ends, a superstitious religion that was already being abandoned by Israel's purer faith.

4. The teacher must choose between three lessons that may be drawn from this story. One is the way God brings good out of evil. Clearly God was overruling Jeroboam's rebellion, and the event which weakened Israel politically made it possible for her to exist simply as a *religious* force and thus furthered God's plan. Another lesson is the value of experience and age and their claims to be listened to. The third lesson, and the one here chosen, is the influence which

a man's acts continue to exert long after he is dead, the power of influence.

B. Notes

Chapter xi. 27. *the breaches*: he finished the wall David had left incomplete.

Verse 28. *mighty man of valour*: i.e. a capable man who got things done.

charge: R.V. "labour," i.e. forced labour.

Verses 31-32. the "ten tribes": a general name for the northern kingdom. Judah really had Simeon and Benjamin also.

Chapter xii. 1. *Shechem*: a very ancient and important place. Abraham settled there, Joseph was buried there, it was a city of refuge and a sacred city.

Verse 11. *scorpions*: a species of spiked whips.

Verse 16. A couplet of verse. Apparently the usual formula, handed down from the time when the Hebrews were nomads. See 2 Samuel 20¹.

Verse 20. *returned*: i.e. from Egypt, where he had been till Solomon's death.

Verse 25. *built*: fortified. *Penuel* was east of Jordan.

Verse 28. *calves, of gold*: i.e. plated with gold.

Verse 31. *an house*, etc.: rather "houses of . . .", i.e. shrines for the images.

Verse 32. *a feast*. This was the Feast of Ingathering, called later the Feast of Weeks.

C. The Lesson

1. A stone dropped into a pool sends out wave after wave to the furthest shore. So here the act of Jeroboam had results far down the ages.

2. *Jeroboam's History.* A man of great capacity singled out by Solomon and placed over the levy ; suspected of treason and flees to Egypt, where he stays till Solomon's death. Evidently known to be on the side of the rebellious elements in Northern Israel. After Solomon's death returns to Israel.

3. *The Course of Events at the Crisis.* (1) The assembly at Shechem and the demands of the northern tribes. (2) Rehoboam's foolish answer (compare Charles I). (3) The revolt. (4) Jeroboam's clever measures to prevent the people going to Jerusalem ; his images at Bethel and Dan, two ancient sanctuaries. Notice, he was not *introducing* superstition, but he was establishing it, and turning the people from the better way to which they were being led.

4. Jeroboam's action was unprincipled and very dangerous. (1) It was bad in its motive, because he did this for ambitious motives and for political ends. (2) It was very evil in its results, because it established in the Northern Kingdom a kind of worship that was associated with moral evil. It was against this Elijah and Elisha and Amos had to fight later.

5. All this shows how much may come of one act of ours. "Our deeds are like children that are born to us. They live and act apart from our will. Nay, children we may strangle, but our deeds never" (George Eliot). The poet Gray says he loves people who leave traces behind them in their journey through life. It depends on the kind of traces. We all leave some kind of traces. They may be bad like Jeroboam's. They may be good. David Livingstone tells that one of his ancestors said he had never been able to find the record

of a dishonest man in his family history. Lecky the historian says that the life of Jesus has done more to elevate humanity than all that moralists or philosophers have said or done. This is what we are doing every day, leaving traces behind us in the lives of others.

6. Two striking historical instances illustrate Rehoboam's foolish conduct, one as a parallel, the other by contrast. The Kaiser William II threw off the advice and support of Bismarck, and preferred the counsels of younger and less wise men. He took his own headstrong way, which ended in the Great War. With Henry V of England it was very different. He was a wild youth, but on succeeding to the throne he dismissed his wild associates, chose the wisest men to be his counsellors and actually confirmed in his post of Chief Justice Sir William Gascoigne, who had sent him earlier to prison.

XLIX. ELIJAH

GOD OR BAAL

1 KINGS 17-19

Date about 870 B.C.

A. For the Teacher

1. *The Situation.* We see clearly the results of Jeroboam's image-worship working themselves out. If people were taught to worship Jehovah by images of a bull there need not be a great step to the choice of Baal as at least a possible deity. The House of Omri, to which Ahab belonged, showed a leaning towards Baal-worship, and this was increased by the marriage of Ahab

and Jezebel, which may have had a political and commercial motive to begin with. But Jezebel was a fanatic, and was set upon making Melcarth, the Tyrian Baal, supreme in her adopted country. This was the occasion of the appearance and ministry of the great Elijah.

2. *A Notable Crisis.* The issue, then, forced by Jezebel, was “Jehovah or Baal?” Jezebel wished to make Baal supreme. Ahab wished to have both. Elijah stood for the truth “Jehovah alone.” It must not be supposed that Elijah in the ninth century taught (or believed) that there is only one God in the universe. That is monotheism, and it was not taught or believed till Amos and Hosea in the next century. The prevalent belief at this time was that every nation had its god, and the truth Elijah taught was that for Israel *Jehovah alone* was to be worshipped and served. This was not far from monotheism, but, theoretically, it did not go quite so far. For all practical purposes, however, it was the same thing. And therefore Elijah’s work in making Jehovah supreme in the national life prepared the way for the work of the great prophets of the eighth century, Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah. What was at stake then in the conflict between Elijah and Jezebel was nothing less than the existence of true religion. A striking parallel is the conflict between Knox and Queen Mary. It is to be noticed that here again we have a clear instance of the progressiveness of Revelation.

3. With regard to the miracles in this section the following wise words of Professor McFadyen may be quoted:—“Rationalistic attempts have been made to

reduce this beautiful religious poetry to the level of bald historical prose by interpreting the word rendered 'ravens' by merchants or Arabs; but it is only fair to interpret such stories in the spirit in which they were written—the spirit of poetry and religious imagination." To this may be added that the task of the teacher is to grasp and convey the *truth* in these stories, viz. the reality of Divine care and Providence, without worrying about their historical character.

B. Notes

Chapter xvii. 3. *before Jordan* : i.e. east of Jordan.

Verse 9. *Zarephath* : on the coast between Tyre and Zidon and therefore in Phœnicia. See Luke 4^{25, 26}.

Chapter xviii. 18. *Baalim* : local deities.

Verse 19. *prophets of Baal* : i.e. of the great Melcarth, the Tyrian Baal.

Verse 20. *Mount Carmel* : the great ridge jutting out almost into the sea. See Smith's *Historical Geography* or Henderson's *Palestine*.

Verse 21. *How long halt ye*, etc. ? Halt = to limp—"how long limp on two unequal legs?" (Glazebrook).

Verse 29. *prophesied* : a bad translation. The meaning is, worked themselves up into a frenzy like Dervishes.

Verse 40. *Kishon* : the stream that ran just below Carmel.

Chapter xix. 3. *Beersheba* : on the edge of the southern desert.

Verse 8. *the mount of God* : called either Horeb or Sinai.

Verses 15, 16. None of these was anointed by Elijah.

Only one was really appointed by him.

Verse 18. *kissed him*: a common form of worship.

Verse 20. *go back*: a test of Elisha's earnestness.

C. *The Lesson*

1. In this lesson we are seeing some of the waves caused by the stone which Jeroboam dropped when he set up the bull images to be worshipped. It was but a step from this to the worship of Baal, and when Jezebel appeared in Israel she determined to make Melcarth, the Tyrian Baal, the supreme god of the land. Jezebel is the real "villain of the piece." Ahab was a weak man and Jezebel was to him what Lady Macbeth was to Macbeth. Show that what was at stake was the very existence of true religion.

2. The appearance of Elijah. His greatness. The Knox of Israel. His mysterious appearances; what he stood for: the supremacy of Jehovah, "*God alone*."

3. *The Sequence of the Events.* (1) Appearance before Ahab. (2) The drought and famine. (3) Elijah at Cherith and Zarephath. (4) Elijah and Obadiah. (5) The great Assembly on Carmel. (6) Elijah a fugitive, his visions at Beersheba and Horeb.

4. *The Great Issue.* The core of the lesson is Elijah's question, "How long will you limp between two opinions?" Ahab wanted to have Jehovah and Baal. Elijah said, "You must have *one or other*." "*God only*" was his watchword. He was like Knox before Mary, like the Baptist before Herod, like Paul before Cæsar, like Jesus before Pilate. He stood for the supremacy of God over life, the true God as King over all. Ahab

was like Cardinal Wolsey, who wanted to make the best of king and God, like the young ruler of the gospels, like the vicar of Bray who was a Catholic under Henry VIII and a Protestant under Edward VI, a Romanist again under Mary and a Protestant under Elizabeth. “Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.”

5. Now notice what comes from choosing “God alone.” It gives courage to face anything, because you *know* God is with you. And it gives help in need. Elijah was not only fearless because of his faith, but in every need God sustained him and cared for him. These things come when you make God your Lord and Saviour.

L. NABOTH'S VINEYARD

HELPING THE WEAK

1 KINGS 21

A. For the Teacher

1. This lesson cannot be omitted, because it is necessary to complete the picture of Elijah. In Lesson XLIX we saw him as the champion of the true religion against error. Here we see him as the champion of the weak and oppressed against tyranny. And this was characteristic of Elijah, *as it was of all the prophets*. Nathan stood up against David, and the prophecies of Amos and Hosea and the other great prophets are full of denunciations of injustice to the poor and the weak.

2. The crime of Jezebel was peculiarly heinous. The land of Israel was possessed by many small proprietors (cf. peasant proprietorship in France to-day), and

these were deeply attached to their crofts because they were not only their own but had come down from their ancestors. And there was another reason. All the land of Israel belonged to Jehovah, and those who owned it held it as a gift from Him. Hence the laws provided clearly against the alienation of the land, Leviticus 25²³ and Numbers 36⁷. This was why Ahab was powerless in face of Naboth's refusal, and why Jezebel did not dare to seize the land until Naboth was executed for treason and his land fell to the crown. It is quite probable that the crime aroused deep resentment and that it was one cause of the fall of the House of Omri.

3. Ahab is presented to us in different lights in two sets of narratives. In the life of Elijah he is weak, superstitious, a tool of his wife. Jezebel, the "fanatical termagant," is the dominating force. They are an anticipation of Macbeth and his wife ("Infirm of purpose, give me the dagger"). But in the account of the Syrian War he is the strong soldier, capable, brave, patriotic. Both pictures are true. Like many others, Ahab was a mixed character, and, like many other men, he was brave and true abroad and a cipher in his own house.

B. Notes

Verse 9. *set Naboth on high*: i.e. on the seat of the accused. Two witnesses were necessary by law for any accusation.

Verse 13. *sons of Belial*: worthless fellows who could be bribed.

stoned him: this was the Jewish method of execution. Stephen was stoned by the Jews; Jesus was put to death by the Roman method.

C. The Lesson

1. *Picture Jezreel*, a city built by Ahab on the spur of Gilboa, a glorious view (see Smith's *Historical Geography*, pp. 381, 382); Ahab's palace at the city wall; and, just outside, a vineyard which he coveted because it would be a fine garden for the palace. Describe a vineyard (any Bible dictionary) and how it was kept and worked, why it was so dear to Naboth, because it was his property that came down to him from his fathers, and because it was God's land given to him to cultivate.

2. Ahab and Naboth. Naboth's refusal (quote).

3. Ahab powerless. Why? Because religion and law and public opinion were all on Naboth's side. And so, Jezebel, who hated to be crossed, hit on a plan by which the land would fall to Ahab without any bargain.

4. Jezebel's infamous plot and its execution.

5. Ahab and Elijah. A dramatic scene! When Ahab drove from Samaria to take possession the first person he saw *in the vineyard* was the stern figure of the prophet.

6. The terrible judgment on Ahab's house for this crime, which probably brought about the fall of this House, as Herod's crime in beheading the Baptist led to his ruin and death in exile.

7. The great truth in this story is that God is on the side of the weak and oppressed. Look at the Bible, at Nathan and Amos and Hosea. The finest example is Jesus cleansing the Temple. This He did because the priests were defrauding and oppressing the poor. So ought all God's servants to be on the same side as

God. And they have been. Witness Andrew Melville, who said to James VI of Scotland when he tried to oppress the Kirk, that there was a King, Christ Jesus, and of *His* Kingdom James was a subject, "not a King, nor a lord, nor a head, but a member." Witness also the story of Becket, and that of Savonarola, and Knox, and the Scottish Covenanters.

8. Hence the duty in this lesson for youth is to stand up for the weak—at school against the bully, outside against those who jeer at some defect in others; to help the blind and the crippled and those who are in need of a champion; and then in later life as citizens to take the side of the poor and the side of justice and fair play for all.

LI. ELISHA

SEEING THE UNSEEN

2 KINGS 6⁸⁻²³

A. For the Teacher

1. We are conscious of a descent as we pass from Elijah to Elisha. Elijah was a very great man and he had a really great message. We can hardly say either of these things about Elisha. He "carried on" in his own way the ministry he had received from his master. And if he was more commonplace, he was also more kindly, more familiar, a man of towns and villages and known to all. But there is one thing in which he resembled Elijah. He was an ardent politician and patriot. He took a great part in public events, as this chapter shows, and there can be little doubt that he

was the “hidden hand” behind the revolution of Jehu (Lesson LII). He was a man of his time, sharing in some ways its defects, its roughness and violence, but he was evidently loved and highly honoured.

2. The narrative of Elisha’s ministry is not a history. It consists of a series of disjointed stories, arranged in a sort of order. They are nearly all miraculous stories (2¹⁹, 4¹, 4³⁸, 4⁴², 5¹, 6¹). Even after his death his bones performed a miracle. These stories were favourite tales with the “Sons of the Prophets” and continued to be told for very long after the prophet’s death. Two of the most beautiful are the Healing of Naaman (which should be taught round the little maid, see Lesson XXIX), and the subject of our lesson. This has been selected because it illustrates one great quality of a true prophet, his intimate converse with God.

B. Notes

Verse 13. *Dothan*: 10 miles north of Samaria.

Verse 18. *when they came down*: i.e. when the Syrians came down from the hills where they were encamped.

C. The Lesson

1. Contrast Elijah, the stern, mysterious, mighty figure, with Elisha, the homely, kindly prophet, yet a real prophet. What is a prophet? One who “speaks for” God. But if a man is to speak for God he must know God. Here is a story which shows how well Elisha knew God and what his knowledge gave to him.

2. *The Syrian War.* Where Syria is, and how dangerous an enemy to Israel. The fact that the

Syrian king could surround Dothan so easily shows how formidable Syria was. But the king's plans were often defeated because they became known to Israel through Elisha. Probably the king talked too much. At any rate he was angry and resolved to take Elisha captive.

3. *In Dothan.* The teacher must give the account of the lad's vision in the beautiful words of Scripture, pointing out the *meaning* of the vision, that these unseen powers were far greater than the Syrian powers.

4. *The Blinded Syrians.* An evidence of this superiority is at once given in the way in which the Syrians are rendered helpless and taken right into Samaria, where, however, they were generously treated and dismissed.

5. The great truth in this story is *seeing the Unseen*. There used to be a well-known book called *Eyes and No-eyes* which showed how much there is in nature that only those with "eyes" can see. There is a great deal. We can't see the ether, we can't see electricity, we can't see thoughts. But that is only part of the truth. There are far higher things than these that we can't "see" with our eyes, and yet are just as real as thoughts or electricity. And one of these is God's presence in history and in our life.

6. *How do we "See" this?* One of the ways is shown in this story—by *prayer*. Prayer opens the eyes of the soul to see God, to see Him so truly that He becomes very real to us. Another way is by *doing God's will* ("Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"). Every single soul who prays and obeys God will know that He is here with him.

7. *What this does for Us.* It does for us what it did for the lad in the story, delivers us from all fear. We are often as much afraid of dangers and trials and disasters as this lad was of the Syrians. And we worry about them. Fear is a great enemy, because we think material forces are dangerous. But once we know God we become sure that He that is with us is greater than any material force. "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Rom. 8³¹ R.V.). "In this story the one sees only the danger; the other, seeing also the unseen Defender, can say to his timid companion, 'Fear not,'" (McFadyen). Point out that the unseen things are by far the most powerful in life. E.g. a thought may break up a civilization. A word may change a whole life. And the most powerful of all forces is the power of the Spirit of God. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit," saith the Lord.

LII. JEHU

ZEAL

2 KINGS 9 and 10

Date 842 B.C.

A. For the Teacher

1. This magnificent narrative, unsurpassed in the Old Testament for graphic power, tells of the fall of the House of Omri and the founding of the House of Jehu, which lasted for a hundred years. Syria, lying adjacent to Israel and to be distinguished from Assyria, had become a rather annoying enemy of Israel. But the rise of the eastern Assyrian power and its ambition

to bring all the western lands into subjection, including Egypt, Israel, and Syria, was keeping Syria busy and lessening her power to harm Israel. Hence the situation we find here, Israel successfully keeping Syria at bay in the region east of Jordan. Jehu was commander there in the absence of the king, Joram, who had been wounded and had retired to Jezreel to recover.

2. The story of Jehu's murderous progress is a dreadful one. First the two kings of Israel and Judah, then Ahab's whole family, then all his following, then forty-two of Ahaziah's relatives, then the whole assembly of Baal's worshippers, all were put to death ruthlessly. Jehu waded to the throne in blood. Yet we must not condemn him too easily. Elijah slew all the prophets of Baal. It was a savage time, and Jehu evidently believed that the whole brood must be exterminated if Baal worship was to cease. He succeeded in his aim. The narrator of "Kings" wholly approved of his actions (10³⁰). It is probable Elisha stood aloof from Jehu's violent acts, and the prophet Hosea condemned them utterly (1⁴). But Jehu was a strong man and there is no ground for doubting his "zeal for Jehovah." He was prompt, brave, and resolute. The keynote of his character was zeal. From our point of view his acts were wrong. From the point of view of his age they were not.

3. Jehonadab the son of Rechab (10¹⁵) was the founder of the Rechabites, a primitive sect of nomads who lived in tents and refused to live in houses, abstained from wine, and would not practise agriculture. They advocated the "simple life." The best account

of them is in Jeremiah 35. Jehonadab evidently agreed with Jehu's "thorough" methods. His followers were intensely loyal Jehovah-worshippers, and their abstinence from agriculture and wine was due largely to their belief that these things had corrupted Israel's pure faith in Jehovah.

B. Notes

Chapter ix. 6. Elisha anointed Jehu privately as Samuel anointed Saul (1 Sam. 10¹) and David (1 Sam. 16¹³).

Verse 11. *mad fellow*. All the ancients believed that inspiration and madness were allied.

Verse 25. *burden*: i.e. prophecy. Cf. Isaiah 13¹.

Verse 27. *garden house*: rather, "Engannim," which was on the way to Judah.

Ibleam, near Engannim.

Megiddo. The way to Judah was cut off and therefore Ahaziah fled north. A different account is given in 2 Chronicles 22⁹, where he is said to have fled to Samaria.

Verse 31. Read with R.V. "Is it peace, thou Zimri, thy master's murderer?" Zimri had murdered his master (1 Kings 16⁹⁻²⁰).

Chapter x. 1. *Sons* probably means "descendants."

Verse 15. *If it be*. This is Jehu's answer.

C. The Lesson

1. *Water* must boil to do its proper work. So must people. They must have zeal if they are to be of any use, and "zeal" comes from a Greek word meaning to boil. Nobody can do anything unless he is in earnest about it.

2. *Here is an Example of that: Jehu.* He was a man full of energy. He was recognized afar off by his furious driving. He did everything decisively because he put his heart into it. Here is his story: (1) The anointing at Ramoth-Gilead. Note how *promptly* Jehu acted and how *thorough* he was. (2) His chariot-drive to Jezreel and the death of the two kings. (3) The death of Jezebel, of Ahab's family and followers. And finally (4) the destruction of the whole of Baal's worshippers.

3. To us these acts are utterly wrong and dreadful. But (1) we must judge a man's acts by his own time not by ours, and according to the standard of that time he did no wrong; (2) Jehu believed he had been anointed by the prophet just for this very thing, to exterminate Baal worship. That was his motive (10¹⁶), and he did this with all his might. We can learn even from wicked men sometimes how to do the right thing. Some men put *all their power* into doing wrong things. This is *zeal*. And we ought to put the same into doing right.

4. Look at some examples. *Columbus* tried everywhere to get ships for his quest, first in his own city of Genoa, then from the King of Portugal, then from the King of Spain, and all the time he endured patiently all kinds of insults and sneers at his enterprise. *Livingstone* was so determined to fit himself for his life-work that in his workshop he had a Latin book propped up where he could catch a line or two whenever he had the chance. *Palissy* the potter broke up the very table and chairs in his room to feed the furnace in which his experiments were being made. Tell also how *R. L. Stevenson* learnt to write with a fine style

by persistent practice. Quote these sayings : "Where there's a will there's a way"; "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might"; "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings." But the frog that sat on the bank with open mouth waiting for flies to drop in died of starvation.

5. Zeal is needed in games, in work, in religion. Put your heart into everything you do—play, lessons, prayers, kindness—and you will do it all well.

LIII. THE WRITING PROPHETS

Date, Eighth Century B.C.

1. We come now to by far the most momentous event in the history of Israel, the appearance of the great prophets of the eighth century. One object of these lessons has been to explain and enforce the reality and importance of the truth that the Divine revelation recorded in the Bible is a *growth*. The truth about God and about conduct came by degrees. It grew like the light from the grey of dawn to the noonday in Christ. We have seen that the conception of God held by the patriarchs was very primitive, anthropomorphic. A great step forward was made when Moses proclaimed God as the God of the nation with a purpose in its life. This was made clearer by Elijah's great message that God alone was to be worshipped. But hitherto there was no real belief that there is only one God in the whole universe. And it was this stupendous truth that the prophets Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah declared. There is only one God, who is the God of

Israel. All other "gods" are nothing but pieces of wood. The true God is behind Creation, behind history, in all life. *All* nations are His servants, even when they do not know it. Such was the teaching of the "writing prophets." It is called monotheism, which is not only a belief in one God, but a belief that only one God exists.

2. There is a great deal of confusion in people's minds as to what a prophet really was. The popular idea is that a prophet was one who foretold future events. But that is a serious error. Predicting was a small part of a prophet's work. Prophet means literally "one who speaks for" some person. That is, he is *one who speaks for God* to man. He received a message from God which he had to deliver to man. Sometimes this message was about the future, about what was going to happen, about the better time that would come when God was to be fully made known. But usually the prophet's message was about the present, about God and His relation to Israel, about God's nature and His will. This message was often about political affairs and about Israel's duty. And so the prophets frequently intervened in national policy. They were statesmen as well as preachers. They were as really statesmen as Mr. Gladstone or Mr. Lloyd George or Lord Beaconsfield. See, for example, how Nathan interfered in the choice of a king after David, Elijah's action towards Ahab, Elisha's anointing of Jehu, the message of Amos about social justice, and so on.

3. Prophecy in Israel may be divided into two periods : (1) that of spoken prophecy, (2) that of written prophecy. In the first period the prophet wrote nothing. He depended on his own personality and authority.

At first he learnt the mind of God through dreams and omens (stories of Joseph, Aaron's rod, Gideon's fleece, etc.). But later these primitive methods were put aside and he learnt God's will in fellowship with God. The greatest of these earlier prophets were Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha. In the second period the prophet began for the first time to write down his message, we shall see in a moment why. These writing prophets are the greatest figures in Israel's history or in the history of any nation. The earliest of them were Amos and Hosea in the eighth century.

4. Now there were certain contrasts between earlier prophecy, which was only spoken, and later prophecy, which was written, or rather between the prophets of the two periods. (1) The earlier prophets used violent means to carry out their ends. Elijah slaughtered Baal's prophets, and others used similar methods. The writing prophets utterly discarded these means and depended entirely on the power of truth. (2) The later prophets wrote down their messages. Why? Partly because the one thing they depended on was the word of God given to them. And they wished this word preserved in order that it might do its work. But partly also because their message was scorned by their contemporaries and they appealed to posterity to vindicate their truth. (3) The third characteristic of the writing prophets was the greatness of the message they had to deliver. It was a message about *God* first of all, as already explained. Monotheism was not dreamt of anywhere in the world at this time, and the Divine inspiration of the prophets can be seen in that fact alone. But they had a message also for and about Israel. One of the chief features of all the writing

prophets is their doctrine that religion must issue in right conduct or it is a sham. That is why Amos and Hosea condemn the unrighteousness and injustice of their time, and say that a religion which is *merely* worship or ritual or sacrifice and not also justice and mercy is really hateful to God. The great prophets were at one in this and were always the champions of the oppressed.

5. Finally, while *all* the writing prophets declared the truth of monotheism, each of them had one special aspect of this truth to give to Israel. They all declared that God was the one supreme Creator and Ruler of mankind, but each had his own message about this God. The following are the chief of these prophets, their dates and their messages.

Amos, 760 B.C. God's Righteousness.

Hosea, 740 B.C. God's Love.

Isaiah, 740-701 B.C. God's Holiness.

Jeremiah, 626-586 B.C. God's Care for the Individual.

Ezekiel, 590 B.C. God's Future for Israel.

2 Isaiah, 556 B.C. God's Universal Reign.

LIV. AMOS AND ISRAEL

RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUDGMENT

2 KINGS 14²³⁻²⁹; AMOS 1, 4, 5, 6 and 7

Date 760 B.C.

A. For the Teacher

1. Jeroboam II was the last ruler of the House of Jehu. He was a great king, a fine soldier, and a lavish

builder. He brought the northern kingdom, Israel, to a pitch of prosperity and power it had not known since Solomon's day. This was due to the fact that Syria, the formidable neighbour which had done Israel so much harm, was being troubled by the great Assyrian empire. Assyria had just begun to carry out her policy of subjugating the nations to the west, and she began with Syria, whose capital was Damascus. Jeroboam was thus free to build up a great kingdom, and he succeeded. There was wealth in abundance in Israel. Palaces went up everywhere; vineyards and olive-yards abounded. And with it all there was great religiousness. Crowds came to the shrines at Bethel and Gilgal. There were lavish sacrifices. The festivals, like the sabbath and the new moon, were scrupulously observed. We learn little of this from the Book of Kings, but we learn much from the prophecies of Amos. There were, however, "two dark shadows which spoiled everything. . . . One near at hand, the other far off. The shadow at hand was the misery of the poor. . . . Famished and ill-clad, cheated and overworked, they lived without either rights or self-respect. The shadow afar off was the army of mighty Assyria drawing ever nearer." (*The Bible for Youth*, p. 416.)

2. Into this situation came the prophet Amos. He came from the terrible desert of Judea, that awful region between Judea and the Dead Sea from which John the Baptist also came, where men see things simply and truly. Amos was not a professional prophet. He was a herdsman, looking after his flock and making journeys to Israel to sell his wool. It was on these journeys he saw the awful condition of the northern kingdom, its contrast of

wealth with slavish poverty, its social injustice and intense religiousness, its outward "service" of God and its moral rottenness. And out of the stern reality of the desert he brought his great message about God and about duty. His message about God was that He was the God of all the earth and ruled over nations as a God of righteousness. His message about duty was that God would accept nothing from men but righteous living. Religious worship plus injustice and immorality was abhorrent to Him and always and everywhere would bring judgment on those who practised it. For his doctrine of God see chapters 1, 4¹²⁻¹³, 5⁸⁻⁹; social wrongs, 5¹⁻¹², 6⁴⁻⁷; empty religion, 4⁴⁻⁵, 6²¹⁻²⁷; certain judgment, 7¹⁻⁹, 9¹⁻⁴; the true way of life, 5⁴, 14-24, 6^{14, 15}.

C. *The Lesson*

1. Describe the *wilderness of Judea* (see Smith's *Historical Geography* or Henderson's *Palestine*) and the influence of its barenness and simplicity on the mind. Amos the herdsman of Tekoa and his occupation. His travels to Israel to sell his wool.

2. *What Amos saw.* Read Amos 4, 5, and 6. The profuse wealth of the rich, the horrible poverty of the poor; the oppression and deceit and self-indulgence and immorality. And with it all a zealous use of the forms of religion, worship, and sacrifice. Amos saw it all in the light of the truth he had seen in the desert, that the righteous God is God of all the earth, to whom all are subject, and who reckons with all.

3. And so he burst on the assembly at Bethel with a terrible message, "God does not want all this ritual

and sacrifice. He wants one thing, justice, right living, truth and kindness. And where He finds injustice and oppression and vice, judgment, awful judgment will fall.” This message came like a thunderbolt on the people, and Amos was forcibly sent about his business (7:10-17).

4. The people would not hear him. And so Amos went home and wrote down his message because he knew it was God’s truth and would be found later to be true.

5. Amos received from God a truth which is as much needed to-day as it was then. We think of God as love, and that is true. But righteousness is a part of His love. And we do not know the truth if we think of God as weak or indulgent. One thing He demands above all is right conduct, doing right by God and man, and all unrighteous conduct is punished, always and everywhere. We cannot ever evade the judgment of God, which is as certain as day and night.

6. This is true of nations as well as individuals. Recall the Roman Empire, France before the Revolution, and Russia before the War. All these powers fell because of social wrongdoing. God judges the nations, and when a nation is like Israel in Amos’ time it is doomed.

7. But it is as true of men as of nations. We cannot escape the results of our evil-doing. No matter how “religious” we are, God demands from us not worship only, but justice and honour and truth. And those who offer Him worship and practise at the same time lying or cheating or filthiness will *inevitably* suffer. *Nothing* will suffice in God’s sight but righteousness, and nothing is so certain as God’s judgment.

LV. THE FALL OF THE NORTHERN KINGDOM

THE HALF-HEARTED

2 KINGS 17, ISAIAH 5²⁶⁻²⁹*Date 722 B.C.**A. For the Teacher*

1. We are come to a tragic event, the end of the kingdom of Israel. Israel had been far more powerful and far wealthier than Judah. Nearly all the great men whose names are mentioned in the history belong to the northern kingdom—Joshua, Gideon, Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Hosea ; all are northerners, and even Amos prophesied in the north. After Solomon Judah had no history till Isaiah's time. And now Israel's end had come. The historical situation is easily grasped. There were two great rival powers at this time at opposite ends of the known world, Egypt and Assyria. Assyria had become the dominant power in the east, and she first appears in the west when she is appealed to by Ahaz to come and save him from the attacks of the kings of Syria and Israel (2 Kings 16⁵⁻¹⁰). Thereafter she had conquered Syria and Israel in turn and the King of Israel (the last king) Hoshea paid tribute to Assyria. But at the instigation of Egypt Hoshea was foolish enough to stop paying this tribute (2 Kings 17⁴), relying on the help of Egypt, which was not forthcoming. The siege of Samaria and its capture were the result. Israel's story had become like that of a Balkan State where kings climbed to the throne

by assassination, and the state of Israel had become so bad that it reminds us of France just before the Revolution. The leaders had the same foolish confidence and there were the same corruption and weakness. But the Assyrian was on the way and Isaiah gives us a magnificent description of his march on Samaria (Isa. 5²⁸⁻²⁹).

2. *Origin of the Samaritans.* One of the most interesting facts in connection with the destruction of the northern kingdom is the origin of the Samaritan people. When Samaria fell, Sargon, who actually reduced it, carried 28,000 inhabitants away to Assyria. In their place he sent colonists of Assyrian men. These intermarried with the women of Northern Israel and from these unions came the half-breed race, half-Assyrian and half-Israelite. This fact explains the feeling that existed later between the pure Jews and the Samaritans. The Jew was bent on keeping himself separate from every taint of heathenism. He was proud of his purity of blood and race. On the other hand, like all half-caste peoples the Samaritans were anxious to be taken for the higher race, and hated the Jew because he would not acknowledge the Samaritans' claim to be Jewish. We find this feeling very strong in Ezra's time, in the book of Nehemiah and in the gospels. It explains the choice of the hero in the parable of the Good Samaritan, which is a characteristic example of the courage of Jesus.

B. Notes

Chapter xvii. 4. *King of Assyria*, not Shalmaneser but Sargon, who succeeded to the throne in 722

when Samaria was captured. Sargon himself tells us he carried away 27,290 people.

Present: i.e. the annual tribute.

Verse 9. *from the tower . . . city*: every type of city from the least upwards.

Verse 24. All these are places in Babylonia.

Verse 25. The Rabbis called Samaritans "proselytes of lions."

Verse 26. It was the universal belief of the time that each land was under the power of its own god.

Verse 28. *how they should fear*: i.e. worship and sacrifice to the god.

Verse 41. Even at the return from exile the Samaritans claimed that they had the same religion as the Jews. (See Ezra 4².)

C. The Lesson

1. How futile is anything in this world into which people put only half their hearts! Games, for example, or work, or religion. It is always failure in every case. Look at a boy with only half his mind on his lesson. "Keep your eye on the ball" is the maxim for golf and for every activity as well.

2. That is the explanation of the tragic end of Israel. She came to her end of destruction because she had served God with only half her heart. Tell the story. The great Assyrian power on the horizon. Its menace. But in Israel nothing to resist it, no power of faith, no strength. Its whole strength had been rotted away by self-indulgence and injustice, like France before the flood of the Revolution overwhelmed her. Hence

when the terrible power came on like a marching Fate (quote Isa. 5²⁸⁻²⁹) Israel fell like a house of cards. One result of great interest is the beginning of the Samaritan race (see *A*).

3. The cause of Israel's weakness was that for long she had tried to serve God *and* Baal, giving worship to God and real obedience to Baal. In other words worship *and* the pursuit of base pleasures, and money at the expense of justice and mercy. The result was that the common people were oppressed, in poverty, while the rich were rolling in luxury. And that meant a nation weakened and unfit to last or stand against any assault.

4. The reason why such half-hearted religion brought disaster is that when you try to combine good and evil in your life the evil rots out the good. Combine worship and dishonesty, for example, and the dishonesty soon makes the sense of God unreal. If you choose to have evil in your life God must go and all God means.

5. Christ's words: "Ye cannot serve God and mammon," "Seek first the kingdom of God," "No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." Does this mean no pleasure? By no means. It means simply "God first." And when God is first all the world and all it contains of pleasure and of good are open to you. "Look, Lord Jesus!" said a Hindu Christian boy when he had made a fine drop-kick at football. That is religion, and the religion that brings strength and endurance and happiness.

LVI. ISAIAH AND JUDAH

ISAIAH 5 and 6

Date 740 B.C.

1. "Happy is the nation that has no history." If this be true Judah from the time of Solomon was happy. Almost nothing is said of her. She produced no great men. Nothing happened like the stirring events of Israel's history. Yet she continued long after the northern kingdom had been destroyed. This was partly owing to her geographical seclusion on a high plateau, partly to the loyalty of her people to one dynasty, and partly to the fact that, on the whole, her life was simpler and her religion purer than Israel's. But about 740 B.C. she began to come into the picture and play her part in the world-drama. The Assyrian power was looming like a dark cloud on the horizon. It had subdued Syria and Israel, and now it was Judah's turn. Assyria's policy was like Germany's, to take her rivals one by one, but she was more successful than Germany in carrying it out. The whole story will be clear and the meaning of Isaiah's prophecies will be clear if it is remembered that the threat from Assyria was the fact in everybody's mind. Ahaz tried to buy off the danger by paying tribute to Assyria. Hezekiah tried to stave it off by alliance with Egypt and others against the common foe. But the question of foreign politics at the time was simply how to deal with the threat hanging over the nation from the power and ambition of Assyria. We shall see in next lesson what attitude Isaiah adopted. But one thing more needs

to be grasped in order to read Isaiah intelligently. Judah had begun to share the wealth and prosperity that were Israel's earlier. And the same evils grew up in Judah which Amos condemned in Israel, the violent contrast between the very rich and the very poor, the moral deterioration of the women, the greed and rapacity of the moneylenders, drunkenness and idolatry. The old simplicity of Judah's life had been corrupted.

2. This was the situation into which came the greatest of the prophets, Isaiah. Glazebrook says that the history of Judah at this time is chiefly of importance as a background to Isaiah's life and prophecies, just as the history of mediæval Italy is interesting as a background to Dante. Isaiah is different from Amos in that he was a noble, and highly educated. He was born about 760. He tells us how he became a prophet. He had gone into the Temple and fell into a kind of trance in which he saw angels with bright wings and "serpent-like forms called seraphim" floating in the distance. He was oppressed by the sins of his people and more and more clearly saw that some one must go to them with the truth. This truth was plain to him, God's supreme greatness and His demand for trust and obedience from His people. But who was to go? Why not Isaiah himself? But he was unworthy. As he thought of this it seemed as if one came with a live coal and cleansed his unworthiness away. And then his "call" was clear and his way determined. He had had a vision of God, of his people, of himself, and of his duty. And so began his great career. Some things may be said of that career which will make it more interesting to read his prophecies. One is that Isaiah was at once a statesman, a poet, and a preacher.

He was a statesman, for many of his prophecies are about "foreign affairs." He was the adviser of the king, a sort of prime minister, and he prophesied about the relation of Judah to Assyria. But his eyes were also on the social condition of the land and he denounced its corruption and vices. As a poet Isaiah is surpassingly great. Good judges think that even in the Old Testament there is nothing so great as Isaiah's poetry. In one respect he is very like Jesus. His images are all from common life. And they are employed with rare skill and restraint. We may not be able to analyse the technical devices of his poetry, but we can all feel its splendour and power.

Two other things may be said. Isaiah shows us how clearly revelation was a growth. How far removed we are in Isaiah from even Samuel with his violence and his primitive ideas! How great an advance in belief and in spirit beyond even Elijah! The other thing to be noted is Isaiah's special message about God. It is God's holiness. This is not merely goodness. It is separateness, and separateness from all human weakness. It is really supreme majesty, "Jehovah high and lifted up." It is the thought of God as above human affairs, ruling them and guiding them, with a great purpose, and having the destinies of both Assyria and Judah in His hands.

3. One thing needs to be said of the Book of Isaiah. When we speak of Isaiah's prophecies we refer only to chapters 1-39. The second part of the book, or a large part of it (40-55), is by an anonymous writer of the period of the Exile (56-66 are supposed to be post-exilic). This is the verdict of criticism and of common-sense. If you discovered a letter to-day with a refer-

ence to the retreat of Mons you would say it must have been written after July, 1914. Similarly, when we find Cyrus mentioned in Isaiah 45¹, we conclude this must have been written after Cyrus was born, which was nearly 200 years after Isaiah. That is one reason for the conclusion that chapters 40-55 are by a later hand. Other reasons are (1) these chapters are a unity; (2) they reflect the period of the Exile, not that of an earlier time; (3) the whole style and language are different from Isaiah's. The two works are found together probably because they occupied one roll, one not being sufficient to fill the roll. There is no interest of faith involved in the question.

LVII. HEZEKIAH AND JUDAH

2 KINGS 18 and 19

Date 727 B.C.

A. For the Teacher

1. Hezekiah's reign, and especially the greatest event in it, become intelligible as soon as we grasp the historical situation. The same is true of Isaiah's prophecies, which are mostly concerned with this same situation. Judah, through the action of Ahaz, had become a vassal of Assyria. But all these great empires lived by force, and by the strength of their kings, and so there were constant efforts made by the subject races to throw off the yoke after the death of each monarch. About this time there seemed to be a good opportunity for Judah to regain freedom. If

only she could form an alliance with other states the thing might be done. This was the motive of Hezekiah's policy. He was attracted by promises of help from Egypt, and, in spite of the fact that Egypt had already proved to be a "broken reed" in the experience of the northern kingdom, he relied on her promises. This was the court policy. But there was another policy, that of Isaiah. He saw the futility of all this diplomacy. He knew that Egypt would give nothing but promises. He foresaw the failure of Hezekiah's measures. And he urged Judah to trust in God and go on quietly living her own life. God would answer the trust of His people. "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength." If we perceive clearly the nature of these two opposing policies we shall be able to read the history and the Book of Isaiah (1-39) with understanding.

2. We do not know the nature of the stroke by which the Assyrian army was overwhelmed. We are only told that the angel of the Lord "smote" it. There is, however, a parallel story in Herodotus (2¹⁴¹) to the effect that Sennacherib's army was destroyed by a pestilence, and pestilence is connected with the "angel of the Lord" in 2 Samuel 24¹⁵. At any rate the great deliverance was the climax of Isaiah's career and of Hezekiah's reign.

B. Notes

Chapter xviii. 4. Hezekiah's reforms were unpopular (18²²) and ineffectual because of the reaction against them later; Josiah had to do it all over again.

Verse 7. *served him not*: i.e. paid no tribute.

Verse 13. *fenced cities*. Sennacherib in an inscription says he took forty-six of these and captured 200,150 people.

Verse 17. These names are titles of office. The Tartan = "chief captain," the Rabsaris = "chief eunuch," and the Rabshakeh = "chief of the officers."

Verse 19. *great king*: a title frequently assumed by these monarchs.

Verse 21. Isaiah denounces the confidence in Egypt (30¹⁻⁵). A similar confidence had destroyed the northern kingdom (2 Kings 17⁴).

Verse 26. The "Syrian language" was what was known later as Aramaic.

Chapter xix. 7. *a blast upon him*: R.V. "a spirit upon him," i.e. I will influence his mind.

Verse 9. *saying*. It was in a letter, as we see later (1⁴).

Verse 12. Places in the East.

Verse 15. *cherubims*: the two carved figures above the Ark.

Verse 29. The sign was that the people would eat the corn that sprang from old harvests, because they would not be able to sow, but in the third year things would be normal and they would sow and reap as usual.

Verse 32. *cast a bank* (or "mound," R.V.). A regular part of siege operations was to raise a mound of earth to the level of the walls so that besiegers would fight on an equal footing with the besieged.

C. *The Lesson*

1. A great danger threatened the people of Judah at this time. The powerful Assyrian empire was

coming nearer and nearer. How was the danger to be met and overcome? There were two ways. The king, Hezekiah, and his ministers, said, "Let us make alliances, and if we have many nations together we may throw off the Assyrian yoke. And we shall have the help of Egypt." But Isaiah said, "No. You cannot defeat Assyria that way. You will fail. Your only safety is to trust in God. Are you not His people? And will He not take care of His own? Your strength is to sit still, do what is right and trust God." Very soon it was clear who was right.

2. *The Events.* (1) The Assyrian army came on and defeated Egypt and all the other nations. Soon it came to Judah. Here the Assyrian king took forty-six cities and carried away about 200,000 inhabitants. (2) Hezekiah tried to buy him off by paying tribute, but he only retired for a little to come back again demanding surrender. (3) The insolent conduct and speech of the Rabshakeh (18¹⁷⁻³⁷). (4) Then Hezekiah turns to the Lord at last for help (repeat or read his beautiful prayer 19¹⁵⁻¹⁹). (5) And God sends him an encouraging message by Isaiah (read the splendid utterance of Isaiah 19²⁰ ff. or at least ³²⁻³⁴). (6) Isaiah's confidence justified, the amazing destruction of the Assyrian host (19³⁵⁻³⁷).

3. The great feature of this story is how a man who wanted to depend on himself and his own cleverness and strength was forced to turn to God when all else failed. This is often what drives men to God. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." Abraham Lincoln once said he was sometimes driven to his knees because he had nowhere else to go. His own wisdom and that

of his friends had failed. Read also Psalm 107²³⁻³⁰, where men are in a storm at sea and in danger. "They are at their wits' end. Then they cry unto the Lord and He bringeth them out of their distresses." This is how men learn to pray. We are driven to God by some need and He welcomes us.

4. And so the great truth emerges in this lesson of the *Sovereignty of God*. God is our refuge. Compare the Exodus, "Stand still and see the salvation of God." That is all we can do. That was Isaiah's great message. In quietness and confidence shall be your strength. If you do the right and attempt your duty, even if it seems impossible to you, God will achieve it through you. Instances : the abolition of slavery, and (greatest example of all) the conquest of the world by the Gospel, in the hands of a few fishermen with all the might of the Roman Empire against them. Conclude by reading Byron's poem (a great favourite with children), "The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold."

LVIII. THE MESSIAH

ISAIAH 11¹⁻⁹

A. For the Teacher

1. No account of Old Testament religion would be complete without a lesson on the great hope of a Messiah. One thing of a general kind must be said first of all as to the nature of Old Testament prediction. The popular idea of prophecy (that it is simply foretelling the future) is wrong (see Lesson LIII). The prophet was one who spoke for God, mainly about the present. Necessarily,

however, he had to speak of the future, as all idealists and reformers have done. But he spoke in terms of his own day. He might cherish, and express, a hope of better things, but his horizon was bounded by his own time. He never predicted in detail an age far ahead. The idea, for example, that in Daniel we have a picture of the twentieth century is ridiculous. The predictions of the prophets were general. They painted a picture of the future, but it was in colours of their own age. This does not mean that their predictions were the less Divine or inspired. God was in them, and meant to fulfil them in His own way, but it was a far better way than any prophet would have conceived.

2. The origin of the Messianic idea was the conviction that God had chosen Israel for a great task and a great future. He had made a covenant with Israel and Israel was destined in the plan of God for great things. We can trace this back to Moses, and it is the hope in Amos (9¹¹, ff.) and Hosea (3⁵). Later this covenant was regarded as being made with David's line in particular, through which the glorious future was to be realized.

3. And so the idea of a ruler who would fulfil his people's greatest expectations was connected with David's House. And the failure of one king after another to realize this idea only threw the hope into the future. Such a king would come. He would be an ideal king and would bring in an ideal time of peace and victory. This was Israel's Utopia. It is the expectation so vividly and beautifully expressed in Isaiah 11¹⁻⁹ and in 9²⁻⁶.

4. It is doubtful whether the Jews ever reached a

higher conception of their Messiah than this. "Messiah" means "anointed" and was nearly always applied to a king. But we have the wonderful conception in Isaiah 53. Was not this a Jewish picture of Messiah? Many writers say "no." They take it as a picture of the true Israel, who is the Servant of Jehovah, Israel purified and consecrated. There is a good deal to be said for this interpretation. But the present writer is inclined to believe the Servant of the Lord of Isaiah 42, 49, 50, and 53, describes an individual. And the fact that Jesus recognized Himself in these passages confirms this.

5. So we may say with some confidence of the hope of a Messiah in the Old Testament: (1) that it sprang from a deep faith in the great purpose of God; (2) that it was strengthened and moulded by the failure of Israel's leaders to embody God's will; (3) that the ideal king who was to come appeared in the people's hope now as a monarch and sometimes as a devoted and consecrated servant of God who would bring forgiveness to the people by his sufferings.

6. Jesus fulfilled this great hope in a fashion greater and more wonderful than any prophet had ever imagined. He broke decisively with all political and worldly ideas of Messiah in the wilderness temptation (Matt. 4). But He took up into Himself all the greatest expectations and desires of the Old Testament and gave them God's own embodiment. And as we look back and forward we see that God was in the hopes of Old Testament saints and prophets. The Old Testament is like a finger pointing forward. It is stamped on every page with a sense of its own imperfection. And Christ came

to realize its divinely implanted hopes. And so we may justly say that the Old Testament is full of Christ.

B. Notes

Chapter xi. 1. The kingdom of David is like a stump of a tree. Yet there is sap of life in it, and it produces a new shoot, i.e. the Messiah.

Verse 2. This is one spirit with six manifestations —two intellectual, two practical, and two religious.

Verse 3. He will not depend on mere appearance or on the testimony of others.

Verse 4. *smite the earth* : rather, “smite the violent.”

Verse 5. A girdle binds the garments together and makes a man ready for action.

Verse 7. *shall feed* : rather, “shall become friends.”

Verse 9. The peace extends to man. *Holy mountain* is Canaan.

C. The Lesson

1. You have seen the bare stump of a tree, with no life in it apparently. Yet one day you pass it and notice a shoot of green coming out. There is life somewhere in it and that tiny shoot will blossom out into a branch and bear leaves. This is the picture Isaiah draws. What does he mean? It is a parable. The stump is the Royal House of David. Isaiah lived in a very dark time. It looked as if Israel was going to be extinguished by her enemies and God's plan brought to naught. But Isaiah knew better. Some time a new shoot would spring from the “dead” stump. The kings had failed God. There was none that was God's

true servant, but a better time would come. The true king would come, and Isaiah give us a beautiful picture of him and of what he would accomplish.

2. *His Origin.* He would be of David's line. The kings of that line had been poor kings. But God was in it. And therefore there was life in it. Life enough to produce a real king after God's own heart.

3. *His Equipment or Outfit.* The one thing he would have would be God's spirit in him. This would give him wisdom and commonsense and a real faith in God. And what could be wished for in a king more than that? He would know what to do without depending on other people (3) and he would get down to truth behind appearances.

4. *His Government.* The one thing that would mark his rule would be justice. He would, for example, be a helper of the poor who had no protector. He would not favour the rich. The violent and wicked would get short shrift from him. But he would not use a sword. His power would be the power of truth and love.

5. *His Achievement.* The one great result of this rule would be peace, peace even among animals that fight one another, and peace among men all over the land (4). No one would then hurt or destroy.

6. What a wonderful picture! What does it mean for us? It means that all who believe in God will also believe that His Spirit will yet bring a better time when there will be peace among men and nations, and when the poor will be the special care of the powerful, when love will prevail. God will bring this about. We may

see many things wrong around us and we may be very sad and despondent. But we cannot lose hope if we have Isaiah's belief in the living God. God will bring about better things if *we work with Him and if we give ourselves up to Him*. If we have His Spirit the great vision of Isaiah will one day be realized. Christ has shown us the way. If we have Christ in us we shall have love in us and we shall be peacemakers in the fullest sense.

LIX. JOSIAH

REVIVAL

2 KINGS 22 AND 23¹⁻³⁰

Date 640 B.C.

A. For the Teacher

1. The influence of Isaiah was great while he lived, but to outward appearance it did not seem to be lasting. Hezekiah's attempt at religious reform was not popular, and after his death there was a reaction in the direction of heathenism. Manasseh, his successor, has the distinction of being the worst king in the history of Judah. He made a clean sweep of the true religion and established idolatries of all kinds in Jerusalem and even in the Temple itself (21). It almost appeared as if the religion of Jehovah would be blotted out. In addition, Manasseh was a persecutor. He tried to kill all the prominent witnesses for the true faith, and (according to an old tradition) Isaiah was one of the victims of this "killing time." Things were as black as they could be when Josiah ascended the throne.

2. A very apt comparison has been made between the reigns of Manasseh and Josiah and those of "bloody Mary" and Elizabeth. The one was marked by reaction and persecution, the other by revival and reformation. Josiah was only eight years of age on his accession and it was not till his twenty-sixth year that he began his famous reformation. But when he did begin, he made a thorough job of it. His religious revolution marks a great epoch in the history of the true religion. And it was remarkable in one respect that it was due to a book ! Surely no book ever had a greater influence on national life. The book found in the Temple is supposed by most scholars to have been our Deuteronomy, or the substance of it. The arguments for this may be found in any good edition of Deuteronomy, or in Glazebrook, or Peake, p. 312. There is good scholarship against this view, but the answer to this question does not matter. The book was undoubtedly one which contained the Law of God in an authoritative form, and that is all that is important for our lesson. The book was clearly an embodiment of prophetic teaching, and the fact that Josiah was able to effect so complete a reformation of religion shows that the teaching of men like Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah had done its work and had influenced the thoughts of the people more deeply than appearances suggested.

B. Notes

Chapter xxii. 3. *scribe* : i.e. the king's secretary.

Verse 14. *in the college* : ought to be "in the second quarter."

Chapter xxiii. 3. *by the pillar* (see 11¹⁴ and 1 Kings 7²¹).

Verses 8, 9. These priests were brought to Jerusalem and included in the Temple staff, but in a subordinate capacity. They were really secondary priests, and were distinguished by the name "Levites."

Verse 9. *did eat unleavened bread*: i.e. received maintenance from the Temple funds.

Verse 10. *Topheth*, the place where human sacrifices were made; and *Hinnom*, the valley running west and south of Jerusalem which contained Topheth and gave its name to Gehenna because refuse and garbage of all kinds were burned in this valley.

Verse 11. *given to the sun*. The sun-god was represented as driving in a chariot drawn by horses (cf. Phœbus Apollo).

Verse 16. *man of God* (see 1 Kings 13²).

Verse 22. *such a passover*. Why? Because hitherto the Passover was celebrated in people's own houses. Now (a great change) it was to be celebrated only in Jerusalem. At the present time it is again celebrated in the home.

Verse 29. *Pharaoh Necho*: the first Pharaoh whose name is given in Scripture.

C. *The Lesson*

1. The influence of Isaiah apparently gone after Hezekiah's death. Reaction set in. The people at heart idolaters. Manasseh's heathenism. Give a picture of it (details in 21).

2. *The Writing of the Book*. But the influence of Isaiah's teaching not really gone. This was shown in

two ways. First of all, there were faithful men who cherished the true faith and who worked for a victory over heathenism. They wrote a book containing the true Law of God for Israel, and they placed it where it would be found, in the Temple. If they dare not *speak* for God in face of Manasseh's bloody persecution they could write down His message.

3. *The Finding of the Book.* When Josiah had reigned for some years there occurred a very remarkable event. This book, containing the prophetic teaching and the Law of God, was discovered by the chief priest, Hilkiah, and its contents were so remarkable that it was sent to the king. The reading of this book changed the whole history of Israel and of the world. It led to the great Reformation of religion.

4. *Josiah's Great Reformation.* One of the ways in which the influence of Isaiah's teaching was shown was the writing of the book. The other way was the training of Josiah. He was only eight when he was made king, but he was surrounded by good men who brought him up in the knowledge of the true God. The Book of the Law which was found so wonderfully gave Josiah the signal and the guidance for a complete reformation of religious rites and practices. Compare Manasseh and Josiah to Mary and Elizabeth (see *A*). See 23 for the description of Josiah's measures, which included (1) a cleansing of the Temple, (2) a complete purging of Jerusalem, and (3) the same measure applied all over the land. Nothing could have been more thorough. And, mark, though there were slight lapses, the work was done for good. Its results were permanent.

5. *The Great Lesson.* What we see here is what we

see constantly in history, *the power of recovery* that is in true faith. Over and over again things have been as bad as they could be religiously. The true faith has seemed gone, religious life has seemed gone. And then suddenly out of the dead stump of the tree has appeared a green shoot with life and it has grown and grown till again there is a magnificent tree. All down the ages there have been these revivals. Examples : The movement under Samuel after the confusion of the period of the judges. The great uprising under David. The Reformation under Luther after the darkness of the Middle Ages. The great revival under Wesley when England seemed to be dead religiously (see Dean Hole's *Memories*). And so we should have confidence in God. A man in ancient Rome had a statue put up to him "because he never despaired of the Republic." So we should never despair of the Church or of Christianity, however many croakers tell us that things are going from bad to worse. "God's in His heaven." Indeed we ought to say "God's in His world." God is the *living* God and is never really absent from His own work.

LX. JEREMIAH AND THE FALL OF JERUSALEM GOD AND THE SOUL

2 KINGS 24 AND 25, AND THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

Date 586 B.C.

A. For the Teacher

1. The Book of Jeremiah is little read. This may be because it is depressing. In any case it is a pity, for

several reasons: (1) The great events which occurred at this time (600-586 B.C.) can only be visualized by reading Jeremiah. The narrative in Kings is meagre in the extreme and has to be filled out by the vivid story told by the prophet and his secretary, Baruch. (2) Jeremiah is one of the greatest religious teachers in history. His message (the spirituality of religion) is the greatest any prophet delivered (read esp. 9²³⁻²⁴). And (3) the biography of Jeremiah is inspiring. Dr. Foakes Jackson calls him "querulous," but what will impress most readers is his perfect selflessness and his heroic spirit. He was the kind of man who was timid by nature, but a sense of duty gave him a splendid moral courage. It is thought by many scholars that Jeremiah is the model from which the portrait of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 was drawn, and it is quite likely.

2. The events of the time, though of great importance, are only the background for the life of Jeremiah. Yet the one great event overshadows everything in its significance, the fall of Jerusalem and the ruin of the State. We get the real story of this in Jeremiah, large parts of which are by his disciple, Baruch. It would be helpful to the teacher if he would read rapidly through the narrative parts of Jeremiah. It would enable him to picture the actual situation when Judah as a kingdom was come to its end.

3. It is important to note that with Jeremiah we come to a new epoch, not only in the history of Israel, but in the history of religion and thought about God. Jeremiah saw that religion must be in the soul, but also that it was a *personal* relation between the soul and

God. Hitherto the religious teachers of Israel had thought of God's relation to Israel as national. The nation was the unit, and Israelites were blessed through the nation. Jeremiah proclaimed that God cares for each soul separately, not as Israelites but as souls (read *Jer. 31³¹⁻³⁴*). This was a great moment in the history of humanity when such a discovery was made and men could say "I am poor and needy yet the Lord thinketh upon me."

B. Notes

There is nothing of special difficulty in the narrative of Kings. The lesson will explain any obscurities.

C. The Lesson

We are now coming to the tragic close of the history of Judah's earthly kingdom. We are going to witness the fall of the great city and the exile of its inhabitants. But all this is mirrored for us most clearly in the life of one of the greatest of the prophets and one of the greatest religious teachers of any age.

1. Jeremiah was a native of Anathoth, a village a few miles north-east of Jerusalem. He belonged to a priestly family. Probably retiring and timid by nature (*Jer. 1³⁻⁶*). Deeply influenced by the Reformation under Josiah (Lesson LIX).

2. This led to his call to the work of prophecy (*Jer. 1*). His reluctance to take up what would be a dangerous mission. His natural fears. Yet, in spite of these, Jeremiah's splendid courage all through his life.

3. His message. A very difficult one. He had to

tell his people that they must submit to Babylon and content themselves with living quietly as its vassals. To resist was folly and meant destruction. Thus the truer Jeremiah was as a prophet the more he appeared a bad patriot. That is always a hard kind of attitude to take. It sets the prophet in opposition to the patriotism of his people. Jeremiah knew he would be unpopular. In point of fact he was in danger of his life from the mob and was rescued only with difficulty (Jer. 26¹⁻¹⁰).

4. Thus rejected and scorned, Jeremiah committed his message to writing and sent Baruch to read it publicly (Jer. 36). Tell the story, the rage of the king and the burning of the roll.

5. Soon the prophet's prediction came true. The King of Babylon came up against the city. At first he only despoiled it and took the king away (2 Kings 24). But later, when the new king, with that folly which seems to have infected every one of them at this time, plotted against Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar came back and finished the job. The siege of Jerusalem, and its capture and destruction (2 Kings 25 and Jer. 39). The inhabitants deported to Babylon. The date of this tragic event is 586 B.C. Jeremiah's narrative will help to make the scene vivid.

6. Meantime Jeremiah had fared badly. His imprisonment by the prince (Jer. 37 and 38). His rescue by the king, Zedekiah, who seems to have been more weak than wicked. Renewed imprisonment by the princes who meant to kill Jeremiah.

7. The last we hear of the prophet is almost the best.

The King of Babylon rescued him on the fall of the city and offered him a position of honour at Babylon. But Jeremiah (like Moses) chose to abide with the wretched remnant of his people. And with them he stayed (Jer. 40) until they went off to Egypt and carried the prophet with them. So our last glimpse of him is of that brave unselfishness which we see in everything he did and said.

8. What then did Jeremiah do? What did God send him out to accomplish? His life seems a failure. He was always against his people. He was unpopular, scorned, imprisoned, nearly killed. But he had a great message and he gave it to the world. It was this. True religion is the trust of the soul in God. It does not depend on earthly power or institutions. Though Jerusalem was destroyed and Israel captive, yet true religion could be more real and powerful without Jerusalem or the kingdom than with them. And it is not in a nation that religion abides but in the individual soul. The humblest soul can live in God and know God. And it is the trust of such a soul in God that is salvation. It is not outward things that make religion, churches or sacraments or Bible or creed, though these are all useful, even essential, as *helps*. But the real thing is *God and my soul*, God holding me and I holding God. We shall see that when Israel grasped this she once more became the people of God and an instrument in His hand.

LXI. THE EXILE

I. THE BLESSING OF SUFFERING

PSALM 137

This and the next lesson are really one subject, but there is too much material for one lesson.

Date 586-538 B.C.

A. For the Teacher

1. When Jerusalem fell in 586 B.C. the people were carried into exile in Babylon, where they remained nearly a half-century. But many had been deported before this. In 701 Sennacherib had taken about 150,000 people away. In 597 a great many were deported, including Ezekiel. And in 586, the date of the "captivity," the best of the remnant were exiled. These Jewish captives were settled, some in Babylon itself, others in different parts of the kingdom. They seem to have been treated well. They were allowed to live together, to trade and to marry, in short to live their own life. So comfortable were they that many refused to return at the Restoration. And if all had been like that the nation would have disappeared as the ten tribes did. But, largely through the influence of men like Ezekiel, they kept together, and, as Psalm 137 shows, they preserved and intensified their love of their ancient Temple.

2. The Exile produced far-reaching events on the people. It changed them in many ways, all for good.
(1) The deepest change was in their character. It was

nothing short of a regeneration. The Exile purified them, made them humbler, cleansed them from materialistic aims, brought them "renewed vitality." They came back later a different people. (2) One change is of special importance for the future. They clung together and resisted all influence from the surrounding heathenism. The old belief in themselves as God's peculiar people was intensified. And they began to set before themselves separateness as an ideal. They were thoroughly purged of their love of idols, and came back with a furious hatred of all idolatry, and with this stamp of separateness upon them. (3) The Exile carried still further, and brought to its highest point, their thought of God. Now His transcendent power and majesty were the dominant view of God. Every trace of localism disappeared. He was the absolute Ruler of the Universe. Doubtless the people lost much of the old intimacy of their faith in God. But they gained in purity of religion and in reverence. And thus the separation from their Temple "made it possible for Judaism to become a world-wide religion." (4) Finally, a change took place in their worship which was epoch-making. They were allowed to worship as they chose. They had no Temple, but they had to have a place of meeting. And so the synagogue was begun, with its free, elastic order of worship and its public preaching. When they came back they brought the synagogue with them, and this became the real characteristic institution of Judaism. Wherever there were Jews there was a synagogue. And it is the real centre of Judaism at this day. The Temple and the priesthood have gone, but the synagogue remains.

B. Notes

Verse 1. *the rivers of Babylon*: i.e. the canals that intersected the city.

Verse 2. *willows*: rather, “poplars.”

Verse 5. *forget its cunning*: rather, “wither.”

Verse 7. The enmity of Edom was ancient and in-veterate. Jacob and Esau struggled together in their mother's womb. Moffatt renders the verse “The Edomites! Remember against them, Eternal, that day of Jerusalem's fall, when ‘Down with her! down with her!’ Edomites cried, ‘raze her to the ground.’”

Verse 8. *who art to be destroyed*: rather, “the destroyer.” Moffatt renders “You, Babylonians, who plundered us.”

C. The Lesson

1. Picture the exiled Jews sitting on an evening about the canals which carried the water from the great river Euphrates through the city. A great city like Venice. Splendid palaces and temples. A gay life. Exiles not badly treated, more like settlers than slaves. They lived in scattered communities, but had their own homes, their trade, their worship. Many of them became rich.

2. But nothing could take from their hearts the love of Jerusalem and its sanctuary. And when, in jest or in kindliness, their conquerors asked them to sing one of the songs of Zion they felt they could not do it. This patriotism became more and more intense as time

went on, but it was purer and higher, not the old blind confidence in Jerusalem but a longing for God's House and a humble gladness in God Himself.

3. You see the Exile, and its sufferings, had changed the people. It purified them. It cured them of idolatry. It gave them a better and nobler faith in God. It helped them to become more worthy of being God's people. Nothing in all their great history had done them as a people so much good as this severe trial and suffering. It was a furnace that tried and purified and brought out the gold.

4. That is what suffering, trial, hardness, pain, disappointment, ought to do. It is what God means it to do. You remember the penitent thief, how his suffering softened his heart and turned it to God. Shakespeare's fine lines :

“Sweet are the uses of adversity
Which, like a toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head.”

Also Browning's *Rabbi ben Ezra* for the older children, specially the fine picture of the Potter fashioning men's souls with His wheel of suffering. “Coddled” children turn out badly. We need discipline to strengthen us and enable us to face life. And what the Exile and its trials did for the Jews our own trials ought to do for us, if we accept them bravely and take them from God. Never complain of your difficulties, for it is difficulties that make men.

LXII. THE EXILE

II. THE SERVICE OF SUFFERING

EZEKIEL 37¹⁻¹⁴*A. For the Teacher*

1. We have seen the moral and spiritual benefit that came to Israel with the Exile. But there was much more. A great benefit came to the world through the Exile. Israel was herself fitted by her experience then for giving the service which God chose her to render, to spread the true religion over the world. She was fitted for this by a purer faith and a definite separateness from the contamination of heathenism. But she rendered another great service to the world by the great literature she produced at this period, the greatest literature in the world. To mention the books written out of the tears and sorrow of this time is enough. First there are the Psalms, many of which belong to the Exile, such as 22, 51, 66 up to 70, and 137. Then there is Job, and finally there is "Second Isaiah" (Isaiah 40-55). Besides this glorious achievement Israel at this time began to gather together the laws passed at different periods and form them into a collection, and also began to form the stories of the past into connected histories. The Hexateuch (the first six books of the Bible), called "The Law," is the product of this period. Many of these laws and stories were very ancient, but they were now revised and edited and made into a connected whole.

2. The great prophet of this period was Ezekiel. His book is little read because of the strange images

in it. But it is a fascinating book if one reads it in the light of its background. Ezekiel belonged to the upper class and was of priestly stock. We know little of his life, but he was taken to Babylon with the captives after the first capture of Jerusalem under Jehoiachin. At first he seems not to have been acceptable to the exiles, but as he lived among them and shared their experience he learned how to talk to them. And so powerful was his ministry that it was he who largely kept the people together and inspired them with the hope and confidence which enabled them to endure in the certainty of a glorious redemption. This gospel of encouragement is found in the most interesting part of the book, chapters 31-37, especially in the two great visions in 34 and 37, one of which is taken as the basis of this lesson. Ezekiel also preached the doctrine of personal responsibility (18) in a way that both rebuked and comforted the exiles. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Every soul is punished for his own sin and not for another's. The exiles were not to lay the blame of their sufferings on their fathers. A man carries his own load both of sin and of goodness. This was for that time healthful teaching, and thus both in rousing their conscience and inspiring hope Ezekiel had a great ministry.

3. One thing more needs to be said about the exile. It was the time when great problems were faced by Israel and serious efforts were made to solve them. One was the problem of suffering, and especially the suffering of the innocent. How was it that God's own people should be oppressed, and that by a power which was cruel and godless? That was Israel's case and the case of many individuals. This problem is faced in

Job and the solution there is that suffering is sometimes a discipline, necessary to purify us and bring us to God. The solution of the psalms of this period was that in another life things will be set right. And so at this time the great hope of immortality sprang up in strength. A very beautiful solution is found in Second Isaiah, where the true Israel is shown to suffer as God's servant for the good of the world. Suffering is a service (Isa. 53). Ezekiel, on the other hand, insists that suffering is retribution brought on us by our own conduct. All these solutions have truth in them and are part of the final explanation.

B. Notes

Verse 1. *the valley*: an imaginary one, where the corpses lay of men who died in a great battle. The bones are scattered. There is not even a skeleton, so little hope of life is there.

Verse 6. *breath*. "The mystery of this powerful passage is heightened by the use of the same word in Hebrew for wind, breath and spirit" (Peake).

Verse 7. *a shaking*. All the bones began to move so that the valley shook.

Verse 12. *graves*. It is the exile that is meant.

C. The Lesson

1. We have seen how suffering purifies and strengthens people. But we are also to see how it fits people for serving God. This was where the Israelites had failed in the past. They were not *fit* to do what God

wanted of them. Now they were made fit. The hope of better things which Ezekiel expresses in this vision was due to his seeing better things in the people.

2. It is true that if you looked at the exiles there did not seem much ground for hope. Like dry bones, scattered and disunited and lifeless. But see! two things happen. The word of God is spoken and the bones begin to move. And then the Spirit of God comes on them like a wind and they come together and become a great army, strong to fight for God and win. That is what is going to happen to people who accept their trials at God's hand and come back to Him in penitence and faith.

3. One way in which the new Israel began at once to serve God was by the glorious literature it produced. (Name the books and describe them.) Another way was in being purified of idolatry and false beliefs and in coming to have a purer faith in God. This made Israel fit to spread the true religion and made it possible for Christ to come in God's time.

4. And so it is often our trials that fit us to do our best work. Look at some striking examples. *Dante* produced his great poem in exile, and owing to his exile. *Bunyan* wrote the *Pilgrim's Progress* out of a prison experience. *Milton* wrote *Paradise Lost* because of his blindness which prevented him becoming a Secretary of State. St. Paul wrote his finest letters from prison in Rome. And Jesus Christ has become our Redeemer through His Cross. So also the great pioneers and missionaries and discoverers have made their contribution to the good of men through sufferings

and dangers. It is in facing hardships and difficulties that we get our fitness for doing the work God sends us to do.

LXIII. THE RETURN

SEPARATENESS

THE BOOKS OF EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

Date 538-430 B.C.

The object of this lesson is to tell what happened when the people were restored to their own land. We end the story of the Old Testament here, but Israel began an entirely new period in her life, a period marked by different conditions, a different religious spirit, different teachers and different ideals. The development between the Old Testament and the New Testament is "another story," but the foundations were laid in the events described below. There is an advantage in taking the series of incidents as a whole so as to present a picture of the Return and the returned people in one view.

1. Who Brought the People Back? The man who began the whole movement was Cyrus, King of Persia. He had conquered Babylon, and was now (538 B.C.) supreme lord of its great empire. One of the first things he did was to issue a decree permitting all exiled peoples to return to their own lands. Many of the Jews refused to take advantage of this. They had prospered in Babylon and were content to remain. But there were many who had learned from Ezekiel to look for God's hand in a restored Israel. And they

began to go in streams across the desert. The biggest company was led by Zerubbabel, a prince of the House of Judah, appointed governor of Judea by Cyrus. About 50,000 people went with him. The story of Zerubbabel is told in Ezra. His achievement was the rebuilding of the Temple. There was great opposition to this by the Samaritans and others, and the building was stopped for a time. But in the end it was finished, and dedicated with great ceremony. Then there is a gap of time of which we hear nothing, from 517 to 458 B.C., when Ezra appears on the scene. He was a scribe living in Babylon, and came with a batch of returned exiles. He brought with him a copy of the Law, which was substantially our Pentateuch, and in his heart a great zeal for its observance. It was Ezra's work to bring the restored community to obey the Law, indeed to make it the basis of all their life. And he accomplished this purpose. It was one of the most important events in all the history of Israel, for now this people founded their religious life on a Book, and a Law-book, and this changed its whole character. The fourth leader now appears (443 B.C.), Nehemiah, whose history is a delightful romance. Read his memoirs over rapidly. They tell a wonderful story and reveal a most attractive personality. Was it not A. B. Davidson who said that in an extremity Nehemiah never tore his hair, he got up and tore other people's hair? His work was the rebuilding of the walls of the city, so as to make Jerusalem secure. He tells us of all the efforts made to prevent this being done, and how he met these successfully. In addition to rebuilding the walls Nehemiah insisted on a thorough reformation of evils, social and religious, and especially on a strict sabbath-

keeping. And thus Israel came back, her Temple was rebuilt, her beloved city was again a walled city, houses were erected and the people themselves set on the way of a new obedience to God's will.

2. *What the People were like when they came Back.* What we see after the Return is a people entirely changed. (1) Outwardly, first of all. Israel had no king, no army, no court. She was not a nation any longer, but a Church, a religious community, a people whose life centred on religion and its ceremonies. Priest and Scribe took the place of King and Captain. (2) The people's religion was founded on Law, on obedience to precepts out of a book. The Pentateuch was the first Bible of the Jews and it became at this time the basis of all their religious faith and practice. Before the Exile the will of God had been proclaimed by prophets, by the living word. Now it was found in a book, and prophecy faded away. There were no more prophets. The religion of the people was legal and ceremonial, a change in some ways for the worse religiously. (3) This Law had two sides. It dealt with ritual, feasts, worship, and so the Priest became a great figure in the life of the people. But there was another side. The Law dealt with conduct. And because it was often doubtful what it meant in practice, a class of lawyers arose to interpret it. They were the Scribes, and these were the real teachers of the people, as the prophets used to be. Henceforth Priest and Scribe are the dominant figures in Israel. And (4) the most marked feature of all was the ideal which was present in all they did, viz. separateness. They set before them this aim, to "keep themselves to themselves," to have nothing to do with the surrounding

nations. They determined to keep themselves clear especially of two things, idolatry and mixed marriages. They wished to keep both their religion and their race pure. This *Separateness* was the watchword of their life from now on. We can see the value of this. It kept Israel from disappearing in the heathen life around. It kept Israel pure to be God's instrument in His own time. It kept the true religion pure to be the fountain-head of a greater religion and a nobler gospel. This rigid strictness was the necessary condition for Israel fulfilling her destiny, and we may be thankful for the Providence that inspired it.

3. And so the story ends on this note of Puritanism. We see the people fading into the mist of a period about which we know singularly little, but as it fades we know what it is like and why it persisted practically unchanged to the coming of Christ. And we can see how much there is to be said for this kind of separateness. It is true that a rigid strictness is apt to degenerate into formalism and self-righteousness. It did so in Israel. Goodness does not consist in giving up this or that doubtful practice. Religion does not consist in cutting off this pleasure or that indulgence. There are people whose religion consists in *not* playing cards or dancing or going to a theatre. But that negative kind of thing is not religion. Religion is loving God and man. These practices may or may not be wrong. Each of us has to decide that for himself. But we know that the one demand of Jesus is for love to God and our neighbour. If we have this love governing us we may do what we like, for we shall not do wrong. Separateness does not mean giving up any "worldliness." It means keeping our hearts from evil. And

this is to be done not merely by excluding things but by living in God. And this is the final lesson of the whole of the Old Testament history. When we love God and trust Him and live with Him we are safe and happy. For that is the secret of all good.

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